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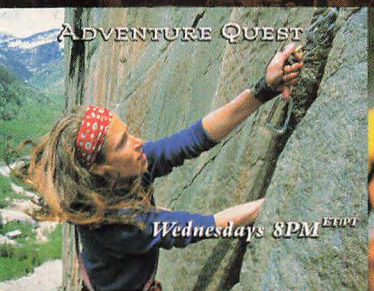

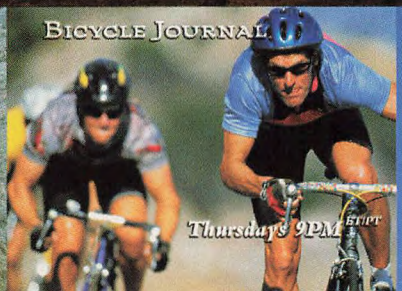

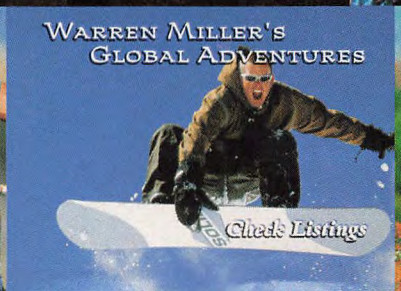

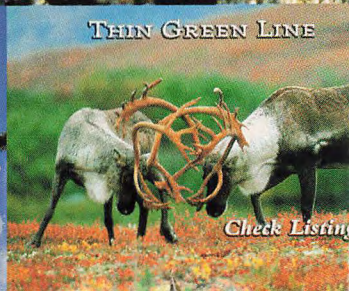

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Contents

INCORPORATING INSIDE SPORTS MAGAZINE

July
1999

Sport

Features

34

Inside Interview: Mo Vaughn
Now able to "think and breathe" again after fleeing the Boston microscope, the Angels' new slugger exhales and lets loose
By Mark Ribowsky

38

Juan Gonzalez, Ivan Rodriguez and Rafael Palmeiro
The reunion of the power Rangers could mean trouble for the rest of the American League
By Mark D. Williams

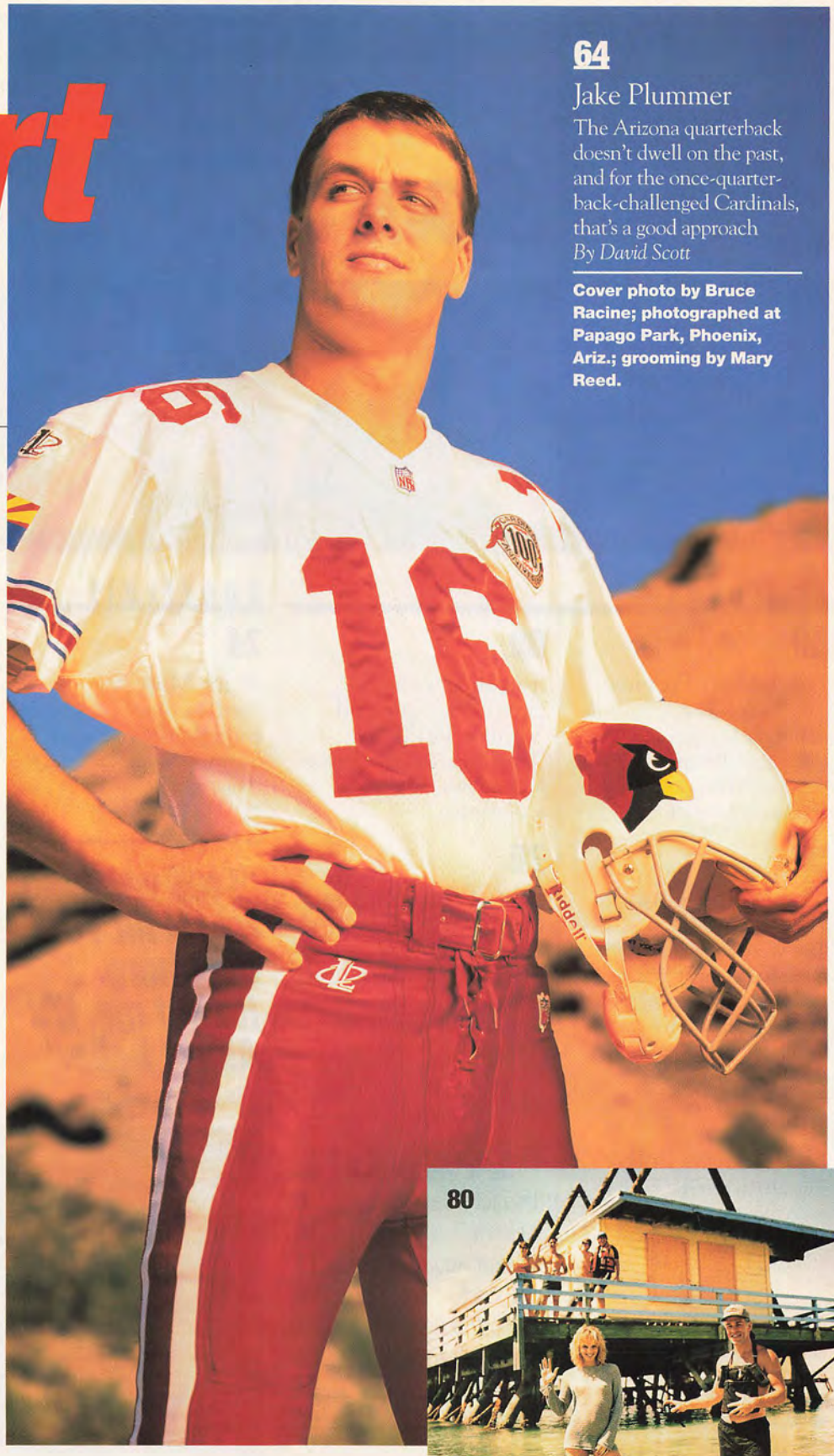
42

Tiffeny Milbrett
If you haven't seen this World Cup soccer star, you're missing a good show. *Plus*: the players and teams to watch as the women's Cup approaches
By Marty Dobrow

45

Victory's Secret
Want to know what it takes to win an NBA title? These guys have the formula
By Darryl Howerton

continued...



64

Jake Plummer
The Arizona quarterback doesn't dwell on the past, and for the once-quarterback-challenged Cardinals, that's a good approach
By David Scott

Cover photo by Bruce Racine; photographed at Papago Park, Phoenix, Ariz.; grooming by Mary Reed.

BRUCE RACINE; INSET: RICHARD DEAN

Contents

July
1999

Sport

Features

50
NBA Draft Preview
The draft's big secret is a little surprising: Few picks become true stars. NBA insiders reveal the players they expect to soar
By Darryl Howerton

56
The Brett Nelson Story–Part III
The West Virginia prep phenom, bound for Florida, ends his storied high school career, leaving his mark on a grateful community
By Mat Edelson

60
NHL Players Poll
The NHL's best spout off on everything from alcoholism and racism to Clint Eastwood and ... E.T.?

69
Terrell Owens, Steve McNair and Vonnie Holliday
Three rising NFL stars primed for their first Pro Bowl appearances

76
Best of the Century: the Olympics
The top 10 moments and athletes in both the Summer and Winter Games
Introduction by Jim McKay

▶ Take part in the SPORT fans poll: Which rookie NFL quarterback will have the biggest impact in '99 and why? E-mail us at:
sport@petersenpub.com

Departments

Impact	8
Letters	16
Locker Room	19
Calendar	28
SPORT Puzzle	62
Mixed Reviews	84
SPORT Quiz	94
Final Out	96

Sportrait

74
Mark Martin
Tired of second-best, Martin is in a hurry to take home his first Winston Cup championship
By Mike Shropshire

"I tell you who might hit 70 over here. It ain't me, it's Albert Belle."
–Mo Vaughn ***page 34***

In-Depth

30
Armen Keteyian
Sports is the future of TV

32
Media
How Mike Tyson drove ESPN's Charley Steiner out of boxing

80
Game Gear
Beach wear

86
Raw Sport
BMX racing

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DAVID DUROCHIK/SPORT PICS; VINCENT LAFORET/ALLSPORT; PATRICK MURPHY-RACEY; MICHAEL PONZINI; COURTESY ALAN TAYLOR; TOM HAUCK/ALLSPORT

Spence put a new twist on an old philosophy. To be one *with* everything, he says, you've gotta have one *of* everything. That's why he also has the new Ford Ranger. So he can seek wisdom on a mountain top. Take off in hot pursuit of enlightenment. And connect with Mother Earth. By looking no further than into

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Impact

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Hey, Scot Pollard, you're not in Kansas anymore! Utah's Karl Malone muscles his way through the strong-arm tactics of Sacramento's Pollard and Vlade Divac.

ROCKY WIDNER/NBA PHOTOS

3

Impact

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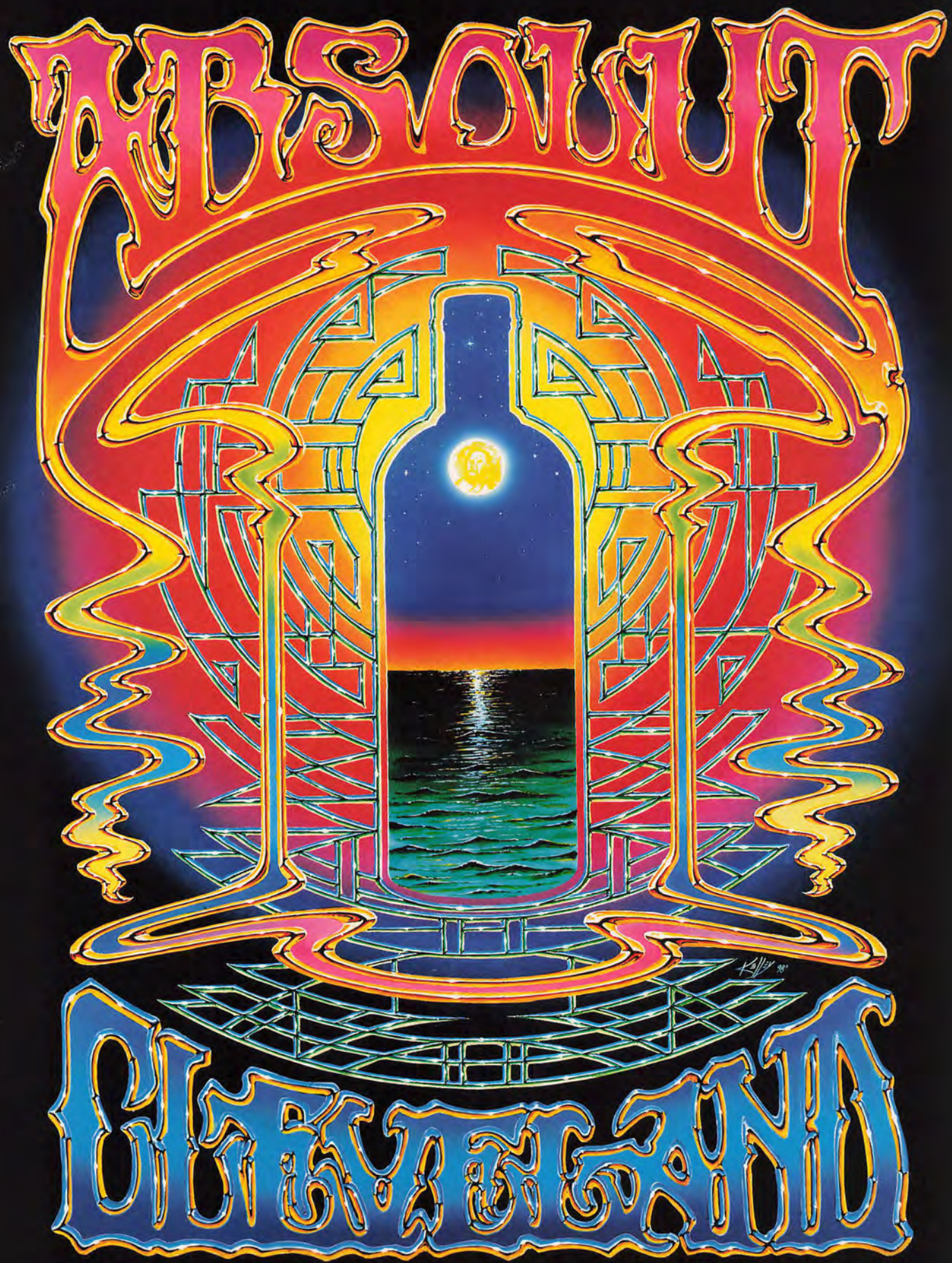
OUT OF THIS WORLD

The men on the tennis tour are definitely from Mars, but thankfully the women are like Venus (Williams): dynamic, talented and thoroughly entertaining.

MATTHEW STOCKMAN/ALLSPORT



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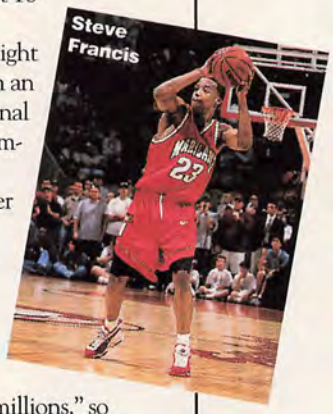
editor's note

THE BACKSTAGE CONVERSATION AT THE men's Final Four in Tampa was standard fare. How much will Duke win by? Can UConn actually pull off the upset? But the hottest topic was speculation over which underclassmen would bolt for the NBA.

The consensus was that Duke sophomore center Elton Brand, having little else to prove in the college game, was history. Based on early projections for Steve Francis (a dunk as a top-three selection), most concluded that the Maryland sensation was NBA-bound as well.

Not me. Call me delusional, but I believe some athletes still play the game for the spirit of competition. To win, not only in terms of victories, but also in terms of personal achievement. Because of that, I thought Francis would stay. Why? I was struck by the uniqueness of him. How he dealt with the preseason hype, the shocked look in his eyes after twin routs at the hands of Duke. The spirit in his game as he almost single-handedly rallied his teammates in the Sweet 16 loss to St. John's.



If he returned, he might have beaten Duke, won an ACC title, gone to a Final Four. His name, his teammates and his school would have been forever associated with greatness. But it won't happen. Granted, I'll never have someone whispering in my ear, "Sign on the dotted line and walk off with millions," so I don't know how tough that would be for Francis to put on hold for a year.

As you'll read in our NBA draft preview (page 50), the scouts are high on Francis. But one never knows how a player's college game will translate to the pros. For instance, no one really knew how good Michael Jordan would be (including us, we hate to admit—see Final Out on page 104). But more often, it works the other way. A great talent leaves school early only to find he's not quite ready.

Let's hope that's not the case with Francis.

Norb Garrett
Editor

PAUL CHAPMAN/BRSP

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Check out this cool awards event - and congratulations to the Ford Sweepstakes winners!

Victor Awards

Don't miss the 33rd annual Victor Awards on Fox Sports Net, live from **Las Vegas** on **June 26**. Nominees are selected by the editors of SPORT Magazine in such categories as coach, player, rookie and comeback for a full range of pro and college sports, then voted on by sportswriters nationally. Big winners last year included Tim Duncan, Pat Summit, Jeff Gordon, John Elway and Mark McGwire. Proceeds for the event benefit The City of Hope.

Ford "Get into the Game" Sweepstakes

We have a winner! The Ford/ABC Monday Night "Get into the Game" Sweepstakes grand prize goes to Jesse Washington, who's now the proud owner of a brand new Ford Ranger 4-x-2 four-door Supercab XLT. And our first-prize winner, Andrew Zimmerman, had a great time at Super Bowl XXXIII in Miami. Congratulations, guys! And thanks to everyone who entered.

FIELD DAY

I can't see how any person in his right mind can pick Ivan Rodriguez as a better catcher than Mike Piazza, who I believe is the best catcher in baseball history ("Baseball's Best," May). Sure, Rodriguez may have the edge defensively, but Piazza's offensive output is staggering.

John Krizel
Baldwin, N.Y.

SPORT's baseball experts surprise me every year. Before last year, Sammy Sosa was called one of the worst players in the league based on salary. This year, your list of the top five first basemen does not include Carlos Delgado of the Blue Jays. Delgado is second only to Mark McGwire when it comes to his worth to his team.

Benjamin Watanabe
Weymouth, Mass.

As a die-hard Braves fan, I had a good laugh that you rated Javy Lopez the No. 4 catcher. Offensively, he is above average; defensively, he is way below average. Eighty percent of the wild pitches charged to Braves pitchers are a result of Lopez's poor mechanics. He also throws out a low percentage of base stealers.

James Jones
Valrico, Fla.

KISS AND TELL

I have a problem with the way you kiss Gary Payton's butt ("Big Brother's Watching You," May). Payton represents a lot of what is wrong with the NBA. The prevailing NBA attitude is me, me, me, and he is one of the worst offenders. All your magazine does is help that attitude flourish.

Michael Hunter
E-mail

NOT QUITE LIKE MIKE

I am an avid reader of SPORT, but I've got to take issue with your recent anti-Iranian stance ("Be Like Who?" Locker Room, April). Snide, prejudiced remarks and ignorant comments in that article fall short of the standards of a good publication such as yours.

Kevin Khadivi
Hartford, Conn.

If our comments offended, we apologize. —Ed.

ME, ME, ME

There's something about Gary that irks reader Michael.

FANS POLL FEEDBACK

The Question: ***If you were a major-league hitter, which pitcher would you most/least like to face and why?***
Here are a few of your responses:

I would most want to face Tim Wakefield. I would love to see that nasty knuckleball coming at me at 70 mph. I would least like to face Randy Johnson because he's very intimidating and it looks like he's standing right on top of the batters.

Bo Schneider
Dayton, Ohio

I would most want to face Steve Trachsel because I could even hit one of those gopher balls he serves up. I would least want to face a healthy Kerry Wood. He has a rocket arm, and I don't think I could come close to that sweeping hook even if I had a tennis racket.

Jeff Opsahl
Grand Rapids, Minn.

I would least want to face Randy Johnson. He has overpowering stuff and has superb leverage with his 6-foot-10 frame.

Mark Naeser
Jamestown, N.Y.

I would most like to face Mark Wohlers. I would least like to face Randy Johnson because, well, ask J.T. Snow.

Shane Merriman
Anna, Ill.

I would least like to face Randy Johnson because you never know when he's going to throw right at your head.

Andrew Malburg
E-mail

This Month's *Fans Poll Question:*

Which rookie NFL quarterback will have the biggest impact in 1999 and why?

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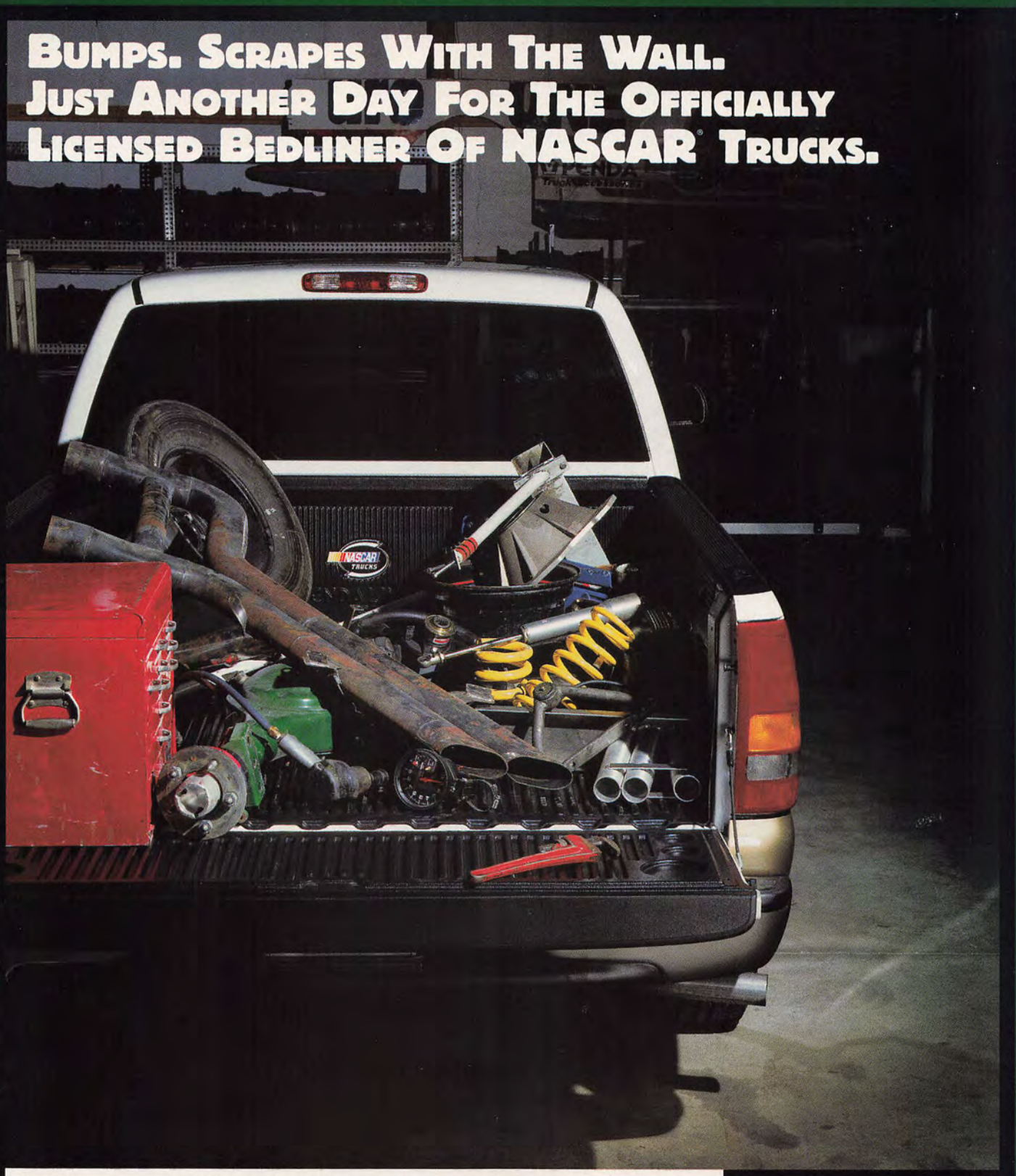

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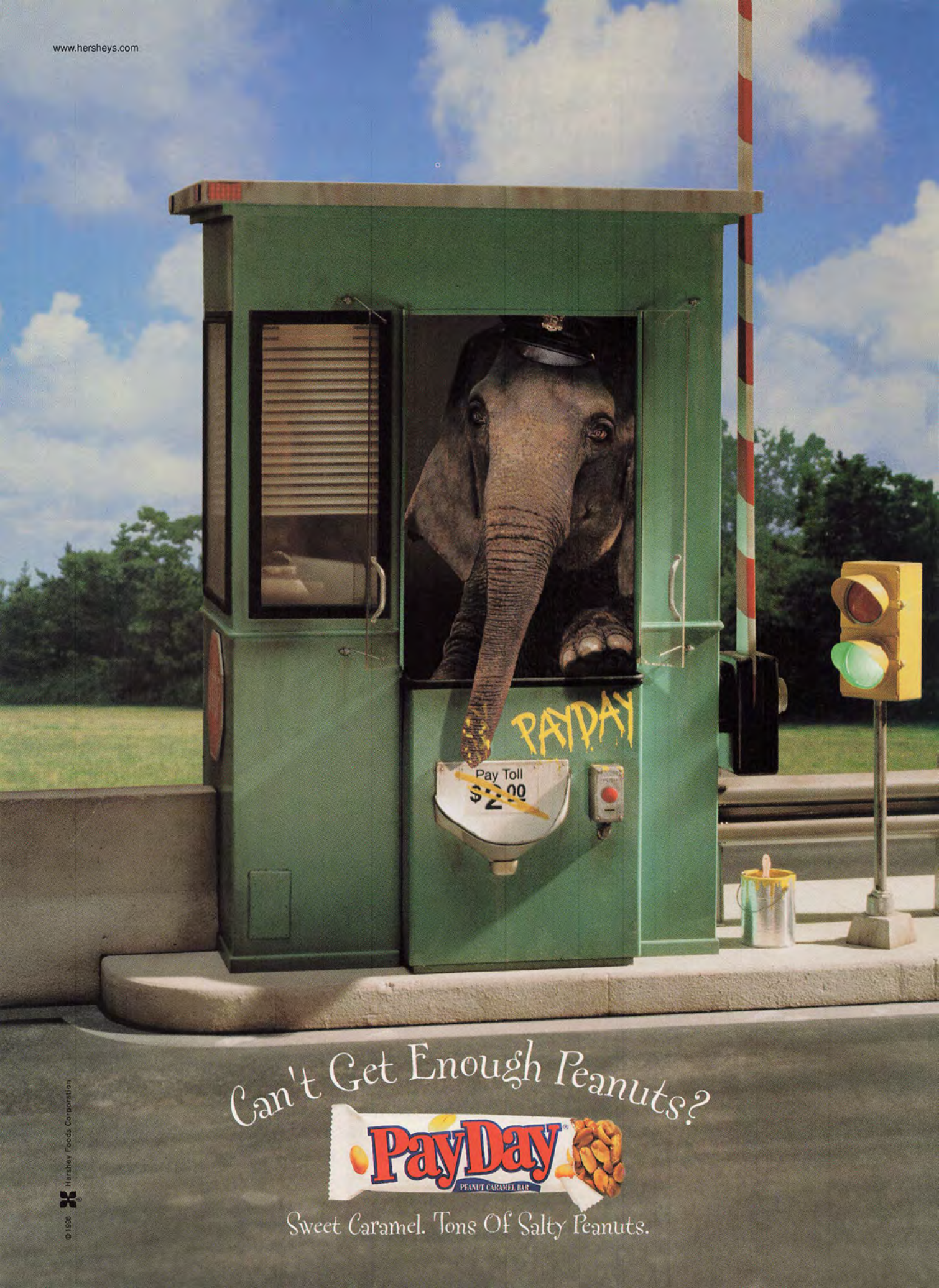
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A ZEBRA, A MINX AND A DOG
SEE PAGES 20, 22 & 26

LOCKER ROOM

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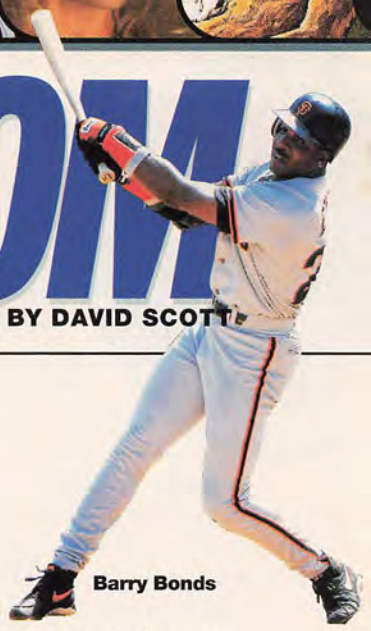

Barry Bonds

The HR Club for Men

Hammerin' Hank, Here We Come

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BASEBALL RECORDS AND THEIR PURSUIT IS what distinguishes the grand ol' game from, say, Major League Soccer. As SPORT began to research the three players—Wade Boggs, Tony Gwynn and Cal Ripken Jr.—rapidly approaching their 3,000th career hit, we found some interesting developments: First, all three men are going bald. Second, Will Smith might rule *The Wild, Wild West*, but he can't hit the curve. Thank you for reading, have a nice day.

Third, and most important for a sports magazine, was the information we gathered from the back of our handy-dandy *Stats Inc. 1999 Major League Handbook*. There we found career projections for some of the game's best hitters. Through a complex formula that mere SPORT mortals could never understand (factoring in the player's age and past performance, among other things), Stats Inc. offers the probability of select players reaching various milestones. For instance, the formula suggests that Ken Griffey Jr. has a 54 percent chance of reaching 2,000 career RBIs (he entered 1999 with 1,018) and a 38 percent chance of joining the 3,000 career hits club (1,569).

Cool stuff, right? Well, most interesting is the category of home runs. According to the data, seven current big-leaguers have an 80 percent chance or better of reaching 500 home runs: Mark McGwire, Barry Bonds, Ken Griffey Jr., Jose Canseco, Sammy Sosa, Juan Gonzalez and Albert Belle. That means that in the next five years, there's a real likelihood that baseball's exclusive 500 Homer Club (*see chart*) will see an almost 50 percent increase from its current 15 members. Four of those players, in fact, have a realistic shot of joining Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth and Willie Mays as the only men to hit 600 or more, and both Griffey and McGwire have a better than 1 in 3 shot of breaking Aaron's all-time record of 755.

"It's all just the quality of players, and it's only going to continue," Bonds says. "There are a lot of young players who are going to be superstars, guys like Travis Lee, J.D. Drew, and I could go on and on."

All of which leads us to three conclusions from our original three premises: Good hitting makes you lose your hair, a curve-clueless Will Smith is still better than half the Florida Marlins (you gonna argue?), and the current hitting records aren't long for this world.

Hank Aaron

FROM TOP: RICH KANE; ARCHIVE PHOTOS; TOP INSETS FROM LEFT: RICH KANE; RICH FREEDA/TITAN SPORTS INC.; KEITH SEIDEL

500 CLUB

The 15 major-leaguers who have hit 500 or more home runs:

Hank Aaron	755
Babe Ruth	714
Willie Mays	660
Frank Robinson	586
Harmon Killebrew	573
Reggie Jackson	563
Mike Schmidt	548
Mickey Mantle	536
Jimmie Foxx	534
Ted Williams	521
Willie McCovey	521
Eddie Mathews	512
Ernie Banks	512
Mel Ott	511
Eddie Murray	504

... And the Seven Wonders

Current major-leaguers likely to join the home run greats:

Name	Entered 1999 with:	Likelihood of 500/600/700/756 HRs*
Mark McGwire	457	98%/93%/54%/34%
Barry Bonds	411	93%/42%/10%/1%
Ken Griffey Jr.	350	92%/87%/60%/45%
Jose Canseco	397	92%/32%/5%/0 or less
Sammy Sosa	273	88%/55%/30%/21%
Juan Gonzalez	301	87%/54%/28%/18%
Albert Belle	321	81%/34%/12%/4%

*All projections provided by *STATS Inc. Major League Handbook 1999*

30: Dollars spent by $42 million player Sammy Sosa on lottery tickets in a $296 million drawing last year >>

SportStats

Rant & Rave

Rebecca Romijn-Stamos

The same fickle folks (yeah, you) who said they didn't miss the NBA but came running back are the same ones who say they won't buy **Holyfield-Lewis II**. Show some guts and stay away, would you please, people? ... It feels like the Atlanta Falcons are a 6-10 team waiting to happen .... Hey, **Rebecca Romijn-Stamos**, there are much better-looking sportswriters you could be hanging with than the **Back Page Guy**. And certainly better than **John Stamos**. Have you ever seen him act? ... Everything changes, we appreciate that, but when it starts changing to the point where **Charlie Spoonhour** can't enjoy teaching kids anymore, it's time to evaluate the situation .... Understand this about the **John Calipari** situation: When he was hired, everyone wanted to believe his type of contract gave the coach control over the players again. It didn't. Coaches have forever lost control .... Yes, **Dennis Rodman** rebounds better than anyone, but the guy's got more issues than *Reader's Digest* .... OK, so it's a long shot, but we're still thinking **Julia Roberts** digs us. She's just playing hard to get .... Arena Football is fine, especially with the NFL's backing, but there is absolutely no need to insult us with the Hawaii Hammerheads facing the Louisiana Bayou Beast in the Indoor Professional Football League .... The All-Star game at Fenway Park: baseball as it oughta be .... Keep your feet in bounds and your eyes on Detroit Tigers prospect **Gabe Kapler**.

Julia Roberts

John Calipari

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Anna Kournikova ----------► **Barbie**

Send Sport Morph ideas to sport@petersenpub.com

MORPH BY BOB ECKSTEIN; KOURNIKOVA: RON ANGLE/LIAISON; BARBIE: LIAISON; REFEREE: RICH KANE; RANT FROM TOP: EVAN AGOSTINI/GAMMA LIAISON (2); RICH KANE

Save the Zebras

THE THANKSGIVING DAY COIN FLIP. THE Jets-Seahawks finish. The Roberto Alomar spitting incident. Dennis Rodman.

The only group more abused than referees is crash test dummies, and at least they get endorsement opportunities. But wait. Before you swallow your whistle and start wiping away tears with your yellow hanky, there's some good news for the zebras of the sporting world. Super-duper earplugs? No, better. Assault insurance.

It's true. The National Association of Sports Officials (NASO, not to be confused with NASA) is now offering official assault insurance to its more than 19,000 members, which include officials at all levels of competition, including the NFL, MLB and NBA. For just the cost of their annual membership ($72), the refs get what Brink's offers: protection.

"Officials have been assaulted for years," says Jerry Markbreit, executive director of the Pro Football Referees Association and a former 23-year NFL ref. "I've been attacked twice. Once, coming off the field of a high school game, someone in the stands reached out and socked me in the jaw. Another time, at a small college game in Illinois in the early '60s, the home team had lost, and our locker room was locked. Players came, took their pads off and pummeled us with them."

Hee-hee, who wouldn't have paid a quarter to take a swing ... ah, sorry, that's not funny, and it's the kind of harassment officials want stopped. Roughing the ref is a problem—NASO received reports of well more than 100 assaults on officials in 1998—and many states have enacted or are considering sports official assault laws.

"I like to say that sports is life with the volume turned up," says Barry Mano, NASO's founder and president and a former Division I basketball referee. "So we shouldn't be surprised that we are now confronted with these issues."

More than 50 percent of NFL refs have signed up for the insurance, and Mano knows the total number will only grow as long as the problems continue. "People out there in TV land see these things and it plants a seed, so in a moment of anger, when they're out of control, that's what happens," says Mano. "They've seen that image."

18: Number of coaches employed by the Clippers in the franchise's 29-year history >>

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WrestleMania

EVERY SPORT HAS ITS PURISTS, THOSE who cling to the past like mildew on a shower curtain. So when wrestling—it's a sport because it has athletes—began its recent renaissance with soaring TV ratings and mainstream celebrities, it got us thinking about the past. Even longing for it. The days when no one would admit it was fake, when the storylines were more mundane, but also more believable. The days of Adrian Adonis, Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka, Sgt. Slaughter, Piper's Pit, King Kong Bundy, Sky Lo Lo, Bruno Sammartino, The Wild Samoans, Stan "The Man" Staziak's heart punch and on and on.

Simpler times for sure. But progress has brought us to this point, never to return. "It's *not* for the Copenhagen-dippin', coupon-clippin', draft beer-drinkin' redneck anymore," says Diamond Dallas Page of World Championship Wrestling (WCW), at once alienating the old guard and uniting the new.

Advertisers have flocked to the squared circle in a battle royale for the desirable demographics wrestling delivers. In fact, WCW's "Nitro" and the World Wrestling Federation's (WWF) "RAW" are the two highest-rated cable programs, and though ABC won't say it publicly, wrestling's got the "Monday Night Football" folks freaking. "It's crazy," says Mankind, a hard-core WWF hero. "I never thought I'd see this rise again."

Those in the business point to a transformation from the days of cartoon characters like Hillbilly Jim to today's no-holds-barred maulers like Stone Cold Steve Austin (WWF) and Bill Goldberg (WCW). "When we created Bill Goldberg," says WCW president Eric Bischoff, "we didn't call him 'Bill the Conqueror' or 'The Leper,' or any typical goofy wrestling name. We just let him be Bill Goldberg, and that makes him more believable."

Part of that "believability" is enhanced because it's such an unbelievable world in which the grapplers live. "No longer is anyone trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes," explains WWF's The Rock. "It's legitimately physical, obviously. But things *are* predetermined. It's a live-action soap opera. It's entertainment."

So please allow us to entertain you as SPORT comes off the top rope with a flying elbow, throws you in a figure-four leglock and then rams your head into the turnbuckle.

OVERTIME

Upcoming Pay Per Views: WWF: "King of the Ring," June 27; WCW: "The Great American Bash," June 13. Log onto: www.wwf.com and www.wcwwrestling.com.

Left, from top: Sgt. Slaughter, George Steele, Bill Goldberg, Jimmy Snuka, Hulk Hogan and Steve Austin. Above: the very able Sable.

WCW vs. WWF

It's like Coke vs. Pepsi. Nah, make that Jack Daniel's vs. Southern Comfort. Better yet, Schlitz vs. Pabst Blue Ribbon—in cans. Here's the breakdown:

	WWF	WCW	STEEL CAGE WINNER
Top Dog	Steve Austin	Bill Goldberg	Austin. Can't go wrong with the Bionic Man
Bad Dog	The Rock	Hulk Hogan	The Rock. Hulk's like what, 73?
CEO, Ringmaster	Vince McMahon	Eric Bischoff	McMahon. Steroids rule!
Evil Empire	The Corporation	New World Order	Microsoft, who else?
Chick in Charge	Sable	The Nitro Girls	Nitro Girls. Power in numbers
Crossover Participants	Pete Rose, Mike Tyson	Karl Malone, Dennis Rodman	Tyson/Rose. The bark and the bite.
Best Prior Sports Life	Mark Henry Olympian	Goldberg Atlanta Falcon	Goldberg. Olympics are corrupt
Worst Birth Name	Shawn Michaels, nee Michael Hickenbottom	Diamond Dallas Page, nee Page Falkenberg	Michaels. Could use the Hickenbottom-Bopper
Top TV Show	WWF RAW is WAR	WCW Monday Nitro	RAW is WAR. Points for attempted palindrome
Worst Character	Gangrel	Disco Inferno	Long live Disco!

THE FALLS OF MANKIND

(a.k.a. Mick Foley)

- Concussion ("Only three diagnosed, but several others")
- Broken nose (three times)
- Dislocated jaw (twice)
- Torn jaw ligaments
- Partially amputated right ear
- Teeth knocked out (several)
- Broken wrist
- Broken thumb
- Broken ribs (seven)
- Torn abdominal muscle
- Right posterior ligament replacement
- Broken toe
- Herniated disks (three)
- Bone chips in elbow
- Stitches (Close to 300)
- Sprained brain (hey, who said that?)

INSETS FROM TOP: RICH FREEDA; STEVE TAYLOR; SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/WCW; TITAN SPORTS; WCW; TOM BUCHANAN/TITAN SPORTS; FAR RIGHT: RICH FREEDA/TITAN SPORTS

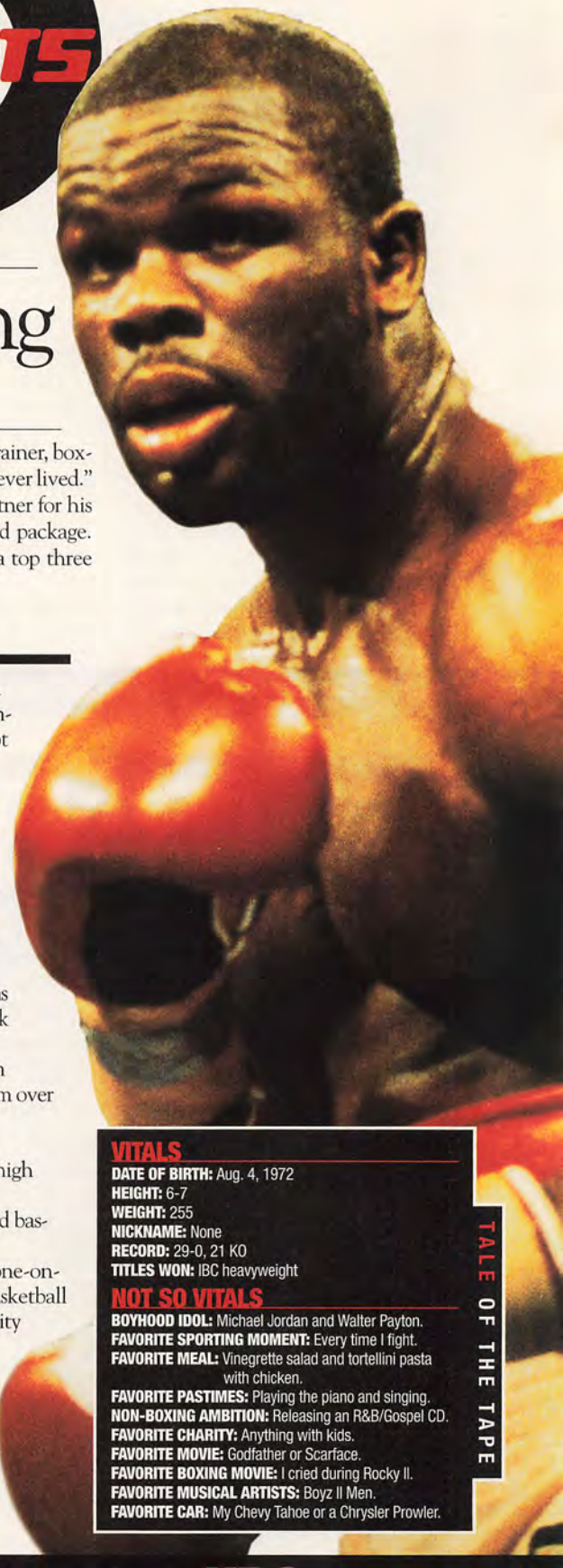
1: Number of Clippers coaches who have posted a winning record (Larry Brown, 64-53 in 1991-92 and 1992-93) >>

HBO® SPORTS

PRESENTS

Heart & Soul of Boxing

Michael Grant



MICHAEL GRANT, by most boxing experts' estimations, is the future of the sport. His trainer, boxing guru Don Turner, goes as far to say, "Michael will be the greatest heavyweight who ever lived." Turner, who still trains boxing great Evander Holyfield, used Grant as a sparring partner for his first fight with Mike Tyson. Grant is an athletic giant, coming in a 6-7, 255-pound package. Already, every respected boxing publication has rated the 26-year-old Grant with a top three ranking, mixing him in with Lennox Lewis and Holyfield.

A QUICK TAKE WITH GRANT

Sport: How has your life changed now that most boxing experts tout you as the next great heavyweight?
Grant: My boxing life is progressing because I'm constantly learning this game. My personal life hasn't changed at all. I have a blessed home with my wife Nicolle and son. I'm the same person and treat everyone as I want to be treated.

Sport: In the press conference after you knocked out heavyweight Jorge Luis Gonzalez two years ago, you said you had a dream that you beat Lennox Lewis. Do you recall that?
Grant: I didn't say that at the press conference for any ego thing. I just gave a vision from a dream I had before that fight. That dream was something. It was brief, I envisioned that I knocked Lennox out. When I woke up, all I could say was, "Man! Man!"

Sport: Is a Lennox Lewis fight the one that will establish you as The Champ?
Grant: I can see maybe Lennox and I mixing it up somewhere down the line. But it's not something I'm waiting on. If Lewis gets the belts from Holyfield, he may want to fight Mike Tyson instead of me. While he does whatever it is, I will be acquiring the skills and knowledge it'll take for me to be champ one day. People ask me if I'll fight Holyfield, and I say, "Naw, I don't see that." I don't see Holy and I fighting because we don't want to fight each other. Besides having the same trainers, we're too close as friends. It's not about egos or about proving who's best. He taught me a lot and I respect him very much.

Sport: Don Turner calls you The Greatest. What does that do for you?
Grant: Don looks at me as a son, and I look at Don as a father figure that I didn't have. My father died when I was 12. So we never had the chance to talk about sex, life, hard work in general. I acquired a lot of that information from Don, who has given me a lot of wisdom over the years.

Sport: How did your experience as a high school baseball player, junior college and college football player and basketball player help you in boxing?
Grant: Football gave me a lot of the one-on-one battling skills I use in boxing. Basketball helped, too, in giving me the mentality where I'd say to myself, "I've got to score this basket no matter how many guys they put on me." By playing all three sports I knew I couldn't quit when it came to boxing, even though when I first started boxing, I didn't like to get hit on and I didn't like to fight.

VITALS

DATE OF BIRTH: Aug. 4, 1972
HEIGHT: 6-7
WEIGHT: 255
NICKNAME: None
RECORD: 29-0, 21 KO
TITLES WON: IBC heavyweight

NOT SO VITALS

BOYHOOD IDOL: Michael Jordan and Walter Payton.
FAVORITE SPORTING MOMENT: Every time I fight.
FAVORITE MEAL: Vinegrette salad and tortellini pasta with chicken.
FAVORITE PASTIMES: Playing the piano and singing.
NON-BOXING AMBITION: Releasing an R&B/Gospel CD.
FAVORITE CHARITY: Anything with kids.
FAVORITE MOVIE: Godfather or Scarface.
FAVORITE BOXING MOVIE: I cried during Rocky II.
FAVORITE MUSICAL ARTISTS: Boyz II Men.
FAVORITE CAR: My Chevy Tahoe or a Chrysler Prowler.

TALE OF THE TAPE

PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

Michael is Fighting on June 19th LIVE on HBO

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From the Promotions Department

THE WORLD NEEDS MORE MIKE Veecks. OK, maybe not. But this section of this magazine needs more Mike Veecks. Veeck, as some will remember and some try to forget, was the genius (and we mean that sincerely) who, 20 years ago, brought Disco Demolition Night to Comiskey Park in Chicago. The promotion was going swimmingly until the fire began, the fans started to riot and the White Sox had to forfeit. Hey, could have happened to anyone.

Veeck's simple problem: He was ahead of his time. Let's face it, Beanie Baby Day is a riot waiting to happen. After 20 years in the minors, where Veeck used mimes for instant replay and toyed with the idea of Vasectomy Night for a Father's Day promotion, the Master of Marketing Disaster is back in the bigs as the Tampa Bay Devil Rays' marketing director.

Veeck needs little help—witness this season's scheduled July 19 Lawyers' Appreciation Night, when attorneys will be royally fleeced at the park. But we'd be honored if he and the Devil Rays would consider the following:

Bobby Knight Night: Toss your seat on the field, win a prize.

Eugene Robinson Night: All female police officers get in free. Forty bucks for all Super Bowl participants.

Marv Albert Night: Show bite marks, get a wig and a pig (in a blanket).

Olympics Night: Highest bribe to each section's usher gets you a seat upgrade.

Phil Knight Night: All megalomaniac corporation bosses get in free. Part of a day-Knight double-header with Ted Turner Day.

Bob Dole/Viagra Night: Every male over the age of 75 gets a free dose of Viagra (excludes managers, coaches, team radio personnel and Cal Ripken Jr.).

You're Insky If You're Lewinsky Night (a.k.a. Doubleheader Night): Anyone with a valid driver's license proving her name is Lewinsky gets in free.

Immigration Night: If you can sneak in, you can stay.

—*DS*

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: STEVE JACOBSEN; BRIAN SPURLOCK; RICK DEMBOW/GAMMA LIAISON; LAUREN GREENFIELD/SYGMA; MIS/SYGMA

1: Number of unseeded players to win a singles title in Wimbledon's 122-year history (Boris Becker, 1985) >>

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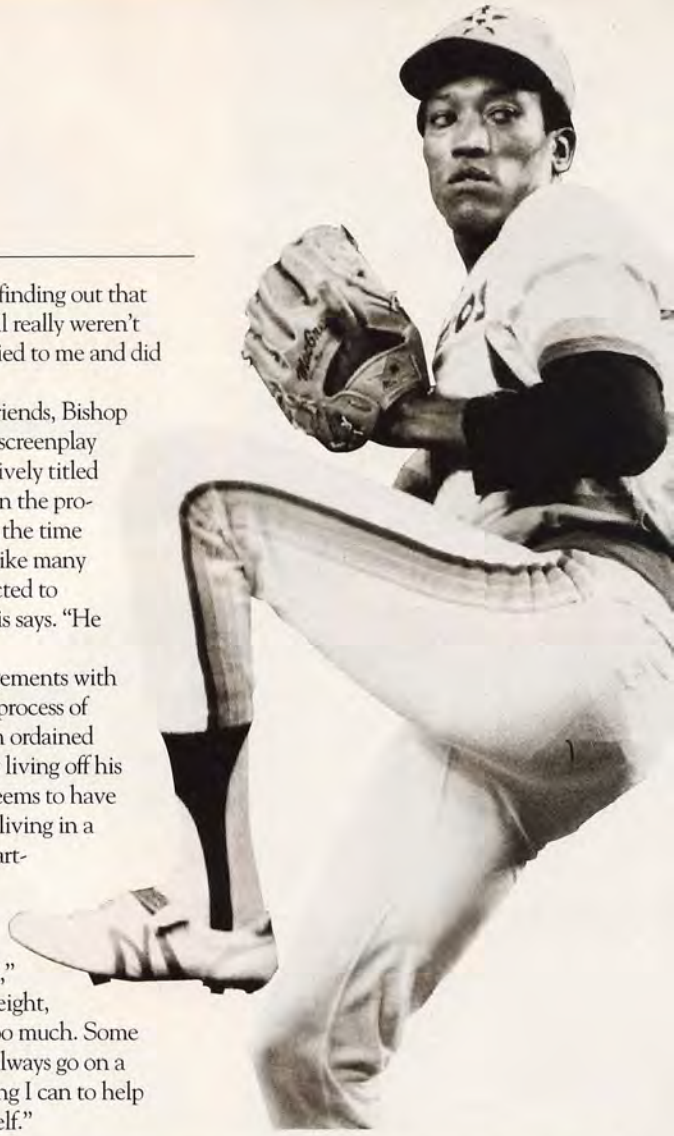

VITALS
Born March 7, 1950, in Vienna, La.
Where He's At Living in Houston and working with the area's homeless

FOR MORE THAN 10 SEASONS, HE STOOD ON a hill and dominated the men who stared up at him. Twenty years ago this summer, J.R. Richard followed up his 303-strikeout season of 1978 with a 313-strikeout season. The Houston pitcher was being mentioned in the same breath with Sandy Koufax. From 1971 to 1980, Richard went 107-71 with a 3.15 ERA and 1,493 strikeouts. At 6-foot-8, he was the Big Unit precursor, mowing down curse-muttering hitters who helped him break some of Nolan Ryan's Astros records.

Then he suffered a career-ending stroke on July 30, 1980, and Richard's life began to drop like a sinker. Bad investments, the lingering effects of the stroke and two rocky marriages brought Richard from dominant to destitute. He fell, and fell hard, and by 1996, the former pitcher had himself struck out, sleeping under a bridge in southwest Houston with no home and a bleak outlook. He is now getting his life back in order, but his past stays with him. "The experience made me better," says Richard, 49. "The lowest point was finding out that the friends I had in baseball really weren't my friends. Those people lied to me and did things behind my back."

One of Richard's true friends, Bishop Floyd Lewis, has written a screenplay about Richard's life, tentatively titled *House of Pain*, which he's in the process of producing. "During the time he was making big bucks, like many of these athletes, he neglected to take care of the IRS," Lewis says. "He owed big money."

Through special arrangements with the IRS, Richard is in the process of repaying his debts. Now an ordained minister, Richard is largely living off his baseball pension. But he seems to have found his way once again, living in a one-bedroom Houston apartment and dedicating much of his time to helping the homeless.

"I'm feeling really good," he says. "I'm a little overweight, but it doesn't bother me too much. Some people are ugly, but I can always go on a diet. I want to do everything I can to help somebody other than myself."

All Bark Doesn't Bite

I GET HOME THE OTHER NIGHT AND THERE'S BO THE BLUNDER DOG SITTING IN the love seat, hind paws up on the coffee table, front paws holding the remote and a can of Colt .45, watching ESPN and listening to his Foo Fighters CD. He wags his tail a bit and points his little pink nose to my chair, indicating he wants me to sit.

I sit. I watch. There are border collies competing in relay races, Jack Russell terriers going over jumps and through tunnels, and golden retrievers, fully extended, diving into a lake. It's something called the Purina Incredible Dog Challenge, and its national championships are June 12 in Gray Summit, Mo., as Bo has scribbled on the message pad. There are also some ESPN and ESPN2 dates paw-written on the sheet.

"X-Games for dogs?" I ask. Bo nods, jingling his collar and tags.

"And you do what all day, exactly?"

He shakes his head, gets off the couch, wags his tail and fetches two beers from the fridge.

"Well, you do have that going for you."

I pat him on the head, rub his chest and focus on the frisbee-catching mutts.

—*DS*

AP/WIDE WORLD; ILLUSTRATION: KEITH SEIDEL

400: Estimated percent increase in adolescent use of Andro since Mark McGwire acknowledged taking the supplement

Locker Room Contributors: Andy Bhatt (WrestleMania chart), Dan Gordon (SportStats); Rob Julavits (Where Are You? ...); Jeramie McPeek (WrestleMania); Mike Reiss (Save the Zebras)

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Edited by Scott Burton

calendar

July

July Highlights

Jose Offerman and **Fenway Park**: Haunted by the Mo Better Blues.

Who's your daddy? That's right, gramps, **Hale Irwin** is. You better recognize.

We'll never get to see *all* of **Tisha Venturini**, but her smile is a fine consolation prize.

Wanna wipe that goofy smile off **Robby Gordon's** face? Ask him if he's related to Jeff.

Schedule of Events

1. Daytona Beach, Fla.
Sport: Auto Racing (NASCAR)
Event: Pepsi 400
Date: July 3
Place/Time: Daytona International Speedway/8 p.m.
How good is Jeff Gordon? Word is, when he dies, Vegas will make him a 2:1 favorite to get that camel through the needle's eye.
Ticket Info: 904.253.7223
Web Site: www.nascar.com
TV: CBS

2. Des Moines, Iowa
Sport: Golf (Senior PGA)
Event: U.S. Senior Open
Dates: July 8-11
Place: Des Moines Golf & Country Club
OK, we hear you people: If Hale Irwin wins this event again, yes, we'll make him a SPORT Dominator. We swear.
Ticket Info: 888.225.1999
Web Site: www.1999senioropen.com
TV: ESPN/NBC

3. Pasadena, Calif.
Sport: Soccer (Women's World Cup)
Event: Championship Game
Date: July 10
Place/Time: Rose Bowl/1 p.m.
Watch the U.S. women's soccer team mutilate an entire nation's spirit in under 90 minutes. Watch them look *really* good doing it.
Ticket Info: 800.WWC.TIKS
Web Site: http://wwc99.fifa.com
TV: ABC

4. Boston
Sport: Baseball (MLB)
Event: All-Star Game
Date: July 13
Place/Time: Fenway Park/8:30 p.m.
Reason No. 1,541 why "power to the people" isn't always such a swell idea: *Starting at third base … Cal Ripken Jr.*
Ticket Info: 617.482.4SOX
Web Site: www.redsox.com/allstar
TV: Fox

5. New York
Sport: Basketball (WNBA)
Event: All-Star Game
Date: July 14
Place/Time: Madison Square Garden/7:30 p.m.
The WNBA checks in with its inaugural All-Star game, the winner of which gets to trade places with the L.A. Clippers for the 1999-2000 season.
Ticket Info: TBD
Web Site: www.wnba.com
TV: ESPN

6. New York
Sport: Baseball (MLB)
Event: Braves vs. Yankees
Date: July 17
Place/Time: Yankee Stadium/1 p.m.
Realize how awesome this potential Maddux-Clemens showdown could be: They're baseball's top two active leaders in wins, ERA and shutouts, and since this isn't the playoffs, they might actually pitch like it too.
Ticket Info: 718.293.6000
Web Site: www.yankees.com
TV: Fox

7. San Diego
Sport: Soccer (MLS)
Event: All-Star Game
Date: July 17
Place/Time: Qualcomm Stadium/12:30 p.m.
The MLS reinstates the Eastern vs. Western Conference format (and if you've heard the nasty things Eastern has been saying about Western's mama, you understand why).
Ticket Info: 619.29PADRES
Web Site: www.mlsnet.com
TV: ABC

8. Brooklyn, Mich.
Sport: Auto Racing (CART)
Event: U.S. 500
Date: July 25
Place/Time: Michigan Speedway/Noon
Like a Kevin Costner movie, the U.S. 500 is a seemingly endless spectacle. Unlike a Kevin Costner movie, the U.S. 500 doesn't induce nausea.
Ticket Info: 800.354.1010
Web Site: www.cart.com
TV: ABC

9. Cooperstown, N.Y.
Sport: Baseball (MLB)
Event: Hall of Fame Induction
Date: July 25
Place/Time: Clark Sports Center/2:30 p.m.
Kiko Garcia, keep hope alive. If the Hall's got room for Rizzuto and Cepeda, the Hall surely has room for you.
Ticket Info: Free
Web Site: www.baseballhalloffame.org
TV: ESPN

10. Los Angeles
Sport: Tennis (ATP)
Event: Mercedes-Benz Cup
Dates: July 26-Aug. 1
Place: L.A. Tennis Center, UCLA
It's time for the ATP Tour to unleash its comeback, here in Hollywood, the town where everyone is forgiven (except you, Charlie Sheen. You just go away—permanently).
Web Site: www.mercedes-benzcup.com
TV: Fox Sports West

International

Le Puy du Fou, France
Sport: Cycling
Event: Tour de France
Dates: July 3-25
Place: Le Puy du Fou to Paris, France
Oh, sure, last year's dope controversy was not pretty. There were police raids, there were suspensions, there were protests, and barely anyone noticed there was also a winner too. But it's not like the Tour hasn't survived dope problems before: John Tesh used to cover this race for CBS, after all.
Ticket Info: Free
Web Site: www.letour.fr
TV: ESPN, ESPN2

June at a Glance: **June 5:** Belmont Stakes, Elmont, N.Y. • Tickets: 718.641.4700 • Web Site: www.nyracing.com **June 14-20:** U.S. Open (Golf), Pinehurst, N.C. • Tickets: Sold out • Web Site: www.usopen.com **June 19:** NCAA Division I baseball championship game, Omaha, Neb. • Tickets: 402.554.4404 • Web Site: www.ncaa.org **June 30:** NBA draft, Washington, D.C. • Tickets: 202.432.SEAT • Web Site: www.nba.com

FROM TOP: AP/WIDE WORLD; CRAIG JONES/ALLSPORT; BEN WATTS/NIKE; JAMIE SQUIRE/ALLSPORT; MAP: USGS/SPL/PHOTO RESEARCHERS

▶**All listed times are local. Dates and times are subject to change. If you'd like to submit a listing, e-mail us at sport@petersenpub.com**

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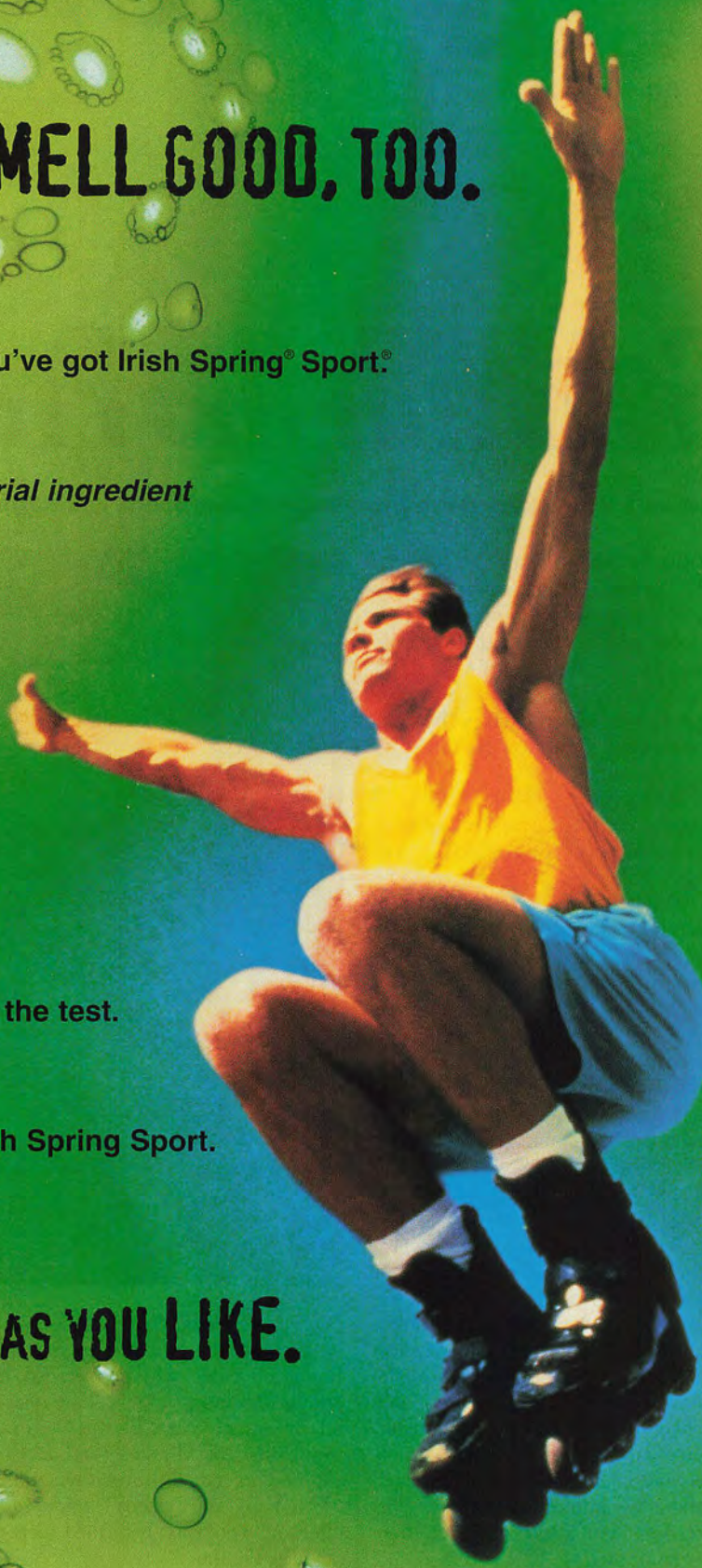

PLAY AS HARD AS YOU LIKE.

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By Armen Keteyian

Get With the Programming

Network Heads Have Done Just That, Knowing Sports Is the Future of TV

SOMEHOW, IT ALL TRACES BACK TO Ted Danson.

There we were, standing together on the sidelines of a nationally televised Denver Broncos game last fall, and I was about to perform a promotional dance with the star of "Becker," a promising new show on CBS. It's formula stuff:

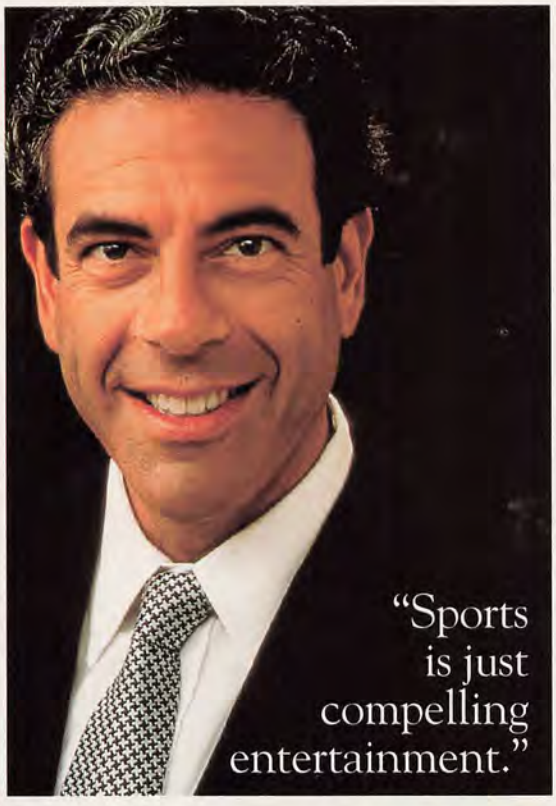
Sideline Guy: "(Network Guy), I understand you have a new show debuting next week. Tell us about it (in 15 seconds or less)."

Network Guy: "Well, I play a (fill in the blank), along with co-stars (fill in the blank), and I'm really (fill in the blank) about it."

Pumping a prime-time show was hardly new for me. From the very first preseason game, our national NFL broadcasts had been packed with promos. At times it seemed as if every 60 seconds Greg Gumbel was pumping "60 Minutes" or "L.A. Doctors," "Everybody Loves Raymond" or "The King of Queens."

We joked about it, but we accepted it. We knew that the success—or failure—of these shows was at the heart of a gut-wrenching $4 billion gamble. CBS Sports president Sean McManus and his bosses had bet the network that the NFL would not only deliver the most desired, and difficult, demographic to reach—18- to 34-year-old males—but carry those men (and a few million women and children) straight into their prime-time programming.

McManus backed that bet because he knows that while network ratings continue to slide, sports programming has dipped less. Today, in a fragmented sports TV universe, exclusive products like the NFL, the World Series and Wimbledon are more valuable than ever. "Sports," says McManus, "will always have a very important, large core audience."



Last fall, the NFL audience came home to CBS, which averaged a strong 10.3 rating and 24 share overall. By season's end, CBS was No. 1 in prime time, "60 Minutes" was back on top, and "Everybody Loves Raymond," "The King of Queens," and, yes, "Becker" were hits. It's called seeing The Big Picture.

Five years ago, media mogul Rupert Murdoch saw it for the first time when he spent $1.5 billion to buy his way into the NFL. Three years ago, at his annual stockholders meeting, the chairman and CEO of the powerful News Corporation declared that sports "absolutely overpowers" any other kind of event as a draw for subscribers. Then he went a step further. "We intend to use sports as a battering ram and lead offering in all our pay-television operations," said Murdoch.

Like his media-savvy peers, ABC's Steve Bornstein understands the passion people have for sports.

Staging this invasion makes producing *Titanic* look cheap. Media conglomerates such as News Corp., Walt Disney Co., Time Warner, Viacom Corp., Comcast-MediaOne, AT&T-TCI and Internet superpowers AOL and Go2Net are spending billions to become major players in this game. They know that in about five years, your computer and TV will become one. They know that thanks to broadband technology, high-speed data services, video and even phone calls will be delivered over advanced communications pipelines.

They know, without question, that packing that pipeline will be 24-hour coverage of everything from the Greater Hawaiian Open to the Jiffy Lube 250. They know that in The Big Picture, what will distinguish winners from losers is ownership and access to the one property of programming that cuts through the clutter: sports.

Paul Allen knows. The media-shy owner of both the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers and NFL's Seattle Seahawks and his investment company, Vulcan Ventures, recently pledged to invest $426 million to purchase the majority share in Internet provider Go2Net, better to download his "software" into your home. Allen understands that the more sports product you own and distribute—the more vertically integrated you are—the more powerful you'll be.

At the moment, Fox and Disney are the twin towers of vertical integration. Murdoch owns the Los Angeles Dodgers (for $350 million) and has spent billions more for substantial interests in 19 sports networks that control the regional TV rights to 69 of the 75 teams in the NHL, NBA and

STEVE FENN/ABC INC.

Major League Baseball. He also owns Fox News, Fox Sports Net and large stakes in satellite broadcast systems in the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, India, Asia and Latin America. Get the picture? Fox Broadcasting chairman and CEO David Hill certainly does. For the last five years, he's been Murdoch's point man in this invasion.

"The potential is that every Web site that's out there now—and at last count there were over two million—has the potential to become, in a very unique way, a broadcaster," says Hill. "In three to five years, we could be living in an environment of two million TV stations. Think about it. What are people going to watch? There's going to be a knitting channel. There's going to be a bass fishing channel. There's going to be a Gregorian chant channel." He pauses just a bit to make his point. "Now sports, in that context, becomes something that as a viewer you want to watch. Sports is the last frontier of reality. Sports is unscripted drama. Sports is the only area where the guy in the white hat doesn't always get to kiss the girl."

Travel to the headquarters of Disney (owners of the Anaheim Angels and Mighty Ducks) in New York and you hear the same song from Steve Bornstein, president of ABC Inc. "Sports is just compelling entertainment," says Bornstein, who got his start as a program manager at ESPN in 1980, just four months after its first telecast. "People get passionate about it. I get passionate about it. In a fragmenting world—and by fragmenting I mean more choices for the consumer—sports, live sports and sports news information have become compelling programming. You can't get that anywhere else.

ERIKO SUGITA/REUTERS

Rupert Murdoch bought in to the NFL after recognizing that sports "absolutely overpowers" other events as a draw for subscribers.

"I look at this as a sum zero game," continues Bornstein, whose brand-name lineup of ESPN products rivals Coca-Cola. "I spend most of my time worrying about people I don't know, who aren't on my radar screen. Those are the ones I lose sleep about, the two kids in the garage somewhere, dropped out of college, who are inventing something that will revolutionize the Internet, revolutionize people's consumption of entertainment."

For you and me, it's a double-edged remote. Sure, down the pipeline, for a price, we'll be able to click, click, click on any event we want. The danger in this brave new world is that the media giants see sport, even a crown jewel like the NFL, as a pure business play. Just another way to do a little dance, promote a prime-time show like "Becker," the next Ted Danson. The danger is that they fail to grasp the importance of the past, of continuity and community. They don't understand that the more you integrate, the bigger you grow, the more you disconnect yourself from your most valuable asset.

You see, the covenant between sports fans and those that bring them their games is, in my mind, The Really Big Picture. Tear it apart and you'll find it not so easily put back together again. ■

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Split Decision

How Mike Tyson Drove ESPN's Charley Steiner Out of the Boxing Arena > By Phil Berger

THERE HE WAS, THE BADDEST MAN ON the planet, walking into his postfight news conference after his rematch victory over Razor Ruddock in 1991. Curiously, though, Mike Tyson didn't proceed straight to the microphones. Instead he approached ESPN's Charley Steiner, the bearded broadcaster whose prime-time interviews with Tyson had given a curious public the best up-close look at this complex individual.

Tyson didn't want to exchange pleasantries, however. Prior to the bout, Tyson saw a "SportsCenter" feature in which fight experts labeled him—correctly, it turned out—a declining heavyweight. Steiner wasn't involved in the segment, but Tyson considered him his link to ESPN, so he fired his anger Steiner's way. Emphasizing each of his words by poking Steiner's chest with his finger, Tyson told him: "You're ... only ... supposed ... to ... say ... nice ... things ... about ... me."

The message was delivered with a straight face, leaving Steiner to think: He just doesn't get it.

For Steiner, it was just another episode in his bizarre relationship with Tyson, one started promisingly enough for boxer and broadcaster back in 1988. Ultimately, tensions became so great that Steiner walked away from the boxing beat after the Evander Holyfield-Tyson rematch in 1997.

"After Tyson bit Evander's ear, I felt that boxing had seen its best days," says Steiner, who turned to the more refined joy of doing play-by-play for baseball and football. "While boxing had been good for my career, bringing me a lot of recognition, I did not want my career to be that of social director of the Titanic."

Steiner took over the boxing beat soon after he was signed by ESPN in 1988, making his association with Tyson—the sport's dominant figure—inevitable. In the beginning, their in-depth prefight interviews displayed Tyson's many sides, often through unexpected tangents. "If you asked a question where he'd preface his answer by saying, 'Can I tell you something?' buckle up your chin strap, you were going for a ride," Steiner says. "For me, he was the most fascinating guy I'd ever interviewed because you had no idea where he was going. I'm not sure he did either. I mean, here was this man-child with the pipsqueak voice who could be charming, funny and occasionally even a neat guy. And then, every once in a while, he might let his guard down. When he talked about his mother, tears came to his eyes and he became vulnerable. It was like he lived beyond a moat and was

Steiner (*above*) had a tumultuous relationship with Tyson and his entourage.

TYSON (4): TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME; STEINER: RICK LABRANCHE/ESPN

letting the bridge down."

It made for good TV, and because both men knew it, they shared a friendly, trusting relationship. But it didn't take long for Steiner to suspect that on that seat-buckled ride to God-knows-where, the twists and turns would eventually lead to dark places.

"Beneath the surface," Steiner says, "you could sense there was bad s--- going on. In about 1990, when things were going well for Tyson and before he was charged with rape, I asked him, 'How do you think America perceives you?' In what would turn out to be the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy, Tyson answered, 'They want to see me as a n----- in handcuffs in the back of a police cruiser.' "

Steiner was "dumbfounded" by the answer, but attributed it to the us-against-them blather that Tyson promoter Don King and camp aides John Horne and Rory Holloway were using on Tyson to make themselves more valuable to the fighter. Steiner would later question on air whether they truly cared about Tyson. The camp's enmity soon followed. In the meantime, Tyson had more serious concerns: He was charged with raping a beauty pageant contestant in Indianapolis.

When Steiner again interviewed Tyson in autumn 1991, King, Horne and Holloway had just made public the name of the plaintiff, Desiree Washington. The propriety of that move led to a fierce post-interview debate. Steiner felt the "outing" of Washington was wrong and said so. King, Horne and Holloway unleashed a screaming, obscenity-laced tirade in their defense.

But the scene, which was played as much for Tyson's benefit as their own, made no impression on the fighter. As Steiner recalls, Tyson at that moment was coming on to an attractive ESPN producer. While King and company raged on—the air filled with mother------ this and mother------ that—Tyson was telling the woman, "You're a pretty sister."

"Tyson was oblivious to it all," Steiner says.

Months later, on the first day of the rape trial, Steiner recalls, "A young fella walked up to Tyson as he sat at the defense table and, after getting his autograph, told him, 'You'll win this one, champ.' Tyson, with that arrogant Tyson look, told him, 'Don't worry. I always win.' "

Later in the trial, Desiree's mother testified—and moved jurors to tears with her account of the emotional damage her daughter had sustained. As the principals returned from lunch, the attorneys convened in the judge's chambers, leaving Tyson to sit alone at the defense table. His body language suggested that for the first time, the enormity of this trial had hit him.

"At that moment," Steiner says, "I remember one of the lawyers for the defense came out for just a moment to pick up a legal pad. And there was nothing between him and Tyson. No pat on the shoulder. No encouraging word. Nothing. And it occurred to me: 'He's no different than Horne or Holloway. He's just there for the payday. Then it's back to the nice country club in Washington, D.C., and that's the end of it.' It was as if they were not sharing the same planet. The damnedest thing. I mean, you have to go some lengths to make Mike Tyson a sympathetic character, but they did."

Steiner's daily reports from the courthouse reflected the grim turns the trial was taking, much to the chagrin of Team Tyson. They expected more upbeat coverage from a man who'd been accorded hours of time with Iron Mike. King, Horne, Holloway and even Tyson would shoot malevolent looks at Steiner as they entered the courthouse each day and climbed the stairway to the courtroom. They projected "angry, threatening, stony silence," says Steiner. "And that was the good news. As time went on, they began spitting curses at me. Horne and Holloway: 'You mother------.' And Tyson would not say it directly to my face, but you could see his mouth move."

Then came the night of the verdict. "As Tyson was walking up the stairs, surrounded by a dozen Indiana state troopers, our eyes met. Mike stops for just a moment and gives me the most frightening stare I've ever received from anyone. I just froze in my tracks. It made the hairs on my neck stand up. It was the last time there was any meaningful communication between us." ■

Steiner has had little communication with Tyson since Tyson's 1991 rape conviction.

INFACT

How did Steiner, a career radio guy, end up on TV? ESPN president Steve Bornstein tracked him down after hearing his neighborhood pharmacist complain that WABC-Radio (New York) had fired Steiner, his favorite sportscaster.

Halo Effect

Now Able to 'Think and Breathe' Again, The Angels' Mo Vaughn Exhales and Lets Loose

> By Mark Ribowsky

With mo money and mo "freedom," Vaughn is glad to be gone from Boston.

BY FLEEING TO DISNEYLAND, FITTINGLY, WHERE ALL DREAMS CAN COME true, Mo Vaughn is 3,000 miles and cultural light years from the turmoil that surrounded him in Boston. The beneficiary of a six-year, $80 million contract from the Anaheim Angels over the off-season, the jumbo-sized first baseman became the second-highest-paid player in the game at the time. Yet his biggest wish may have been less extravagant: to simply be able to crush baseballs in a blessed peace he didn't have in Boston, despite having hit .304 with 230 home runs over eight seasons.

As Vaughn and the Red Sox wrangled over money, his image as a model citizen was sullied by several late-night incidents. The most serious came early last year when—after a night of partying at a Providence strip joint—he was arrested and charged with drunken driving after his pickup truck hit an abandoned car and flipped over on a Massachusetts highway. Although Vaughn was later acquitted, the episode damaged his solid gold reputation in the media and among Fenway Park fans. Another issue was his weight. At 6-foot-1 and 240 pounds, Vaughn seems nearly as wide as he is tall.

Amid all this static, Vaughn hit a career-high .337 in 1998—nearly overtaking the Yankees' Bernie Williams for the batting title—with 40 homers and 115 RBIs. In joining Jimmie Foxx and Carl Yastrzemski as the only Red Sox players to clear the 40-homer mark twice, he led the team to the playoffs. All the while, though, Vaughn, the American League's MVP in 1995, and general manager Dan Duquette spat poison at each other as Vaughn turned down what he called inferior contract offers and Duquette seemed to write him off. Vaughn claimed Duquette smeared him by hiring private investigators to follow him and that Duquette insisted he undergo an alcohol evaluation. Finally, Vaughn turned down the Sox's final offer, $63 million over five years, last November and headed west.

For Maurice Samuel Vaughn, 31, born in Norwalk, Conn., the move broke a chain of Eastern-based ball. He was a three-year All-American at Seton Hall in the late 1980s before the Red Sox drafted him in the first round in '89. He won the first-base job in '92 and collected 29 homers and 101 RBIs the next year. In the five years since, Vaughn has never hit below .300 and has hit at least 35 homers in each of the last four years. With a new life and a fat new contract in hand, the "Hit Dog" sat down with SPORT and sounded off about his past, the tawdry accusations against him, and the challenges ahead.

BOB ROSATO

Mo Vaughn

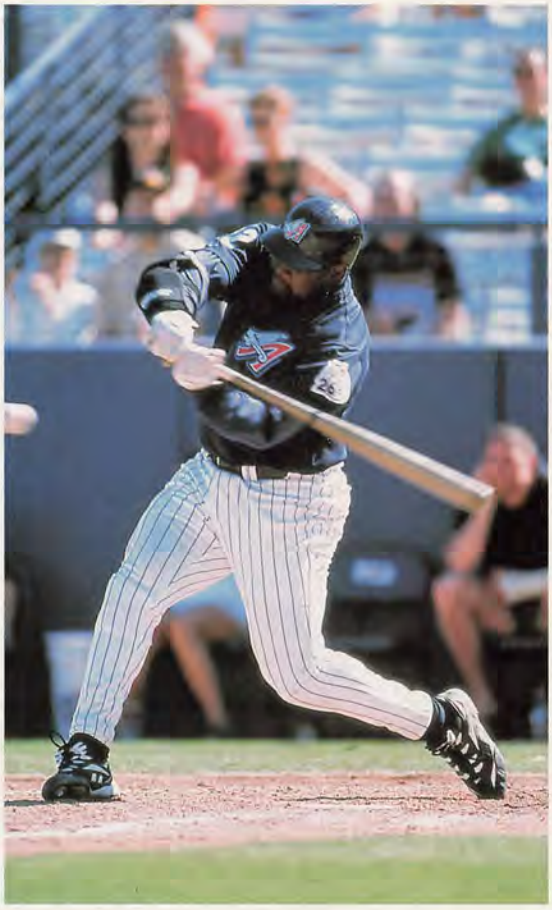
Sport: Did you intentionally move as far away from Boston as you could?
Vaughn: No, but I did want to go someplace where I could breathe. I was waiting to exhale all last year, and now I am. I can think and breathe and do the same things as everybody else on my team. I have people from top to bottom here thinking on the same page, going for the same goal, whereas in the past I don't think that was the case. It's more than that, though. It's nice to be on the same page with your manager and your coaches and your teammates, but it's much better when you've got a front office that's on your page too. That's new for me.

Sport: The Angels blew a chance to get Mark McGwire two years ago. Do they want you to fill that role?
Vaughn: Well, I know somebody's got to save face for the American League in that home run race. Those two guys broke the record in the National League last year, so now we've got to do it. But I tell you who might hit 70 over here. It ain't me, it's Albert Belle. I think he's got the best shot now, especially playing in that small ballpark in Baltimore. I'm not really a home run hitter. I'm a line drive hitter with power.

Sport: Do you train the way guys like McGwire do?
Vaughn: I've had a physical trainer for five years. Year after year I've learned more about getting stronger. I work out consistently throughout the year to maintain strength. That also used to be unheard of. People talk about my weight, but I know my body. My weight is good for me. I can carry it. Did I hit .340? Did I stay strong? So what's the issue? It's like this, man: If you want someone to be on your team, you're not going to come up with all types of things to make it tougher to keep him. You understand what I'm saying?

Sport: That the Red Sox didn't want you?
Vaughn: You got it. My weight was never a problem until last year, so what does that tell you?

Sport: You once said you could tell if you were in shape by whether you could dunk a basketball. Can you do that now?
Vaughn: Pretty much [*delayed laugh*].



Vaughn takes his swings at Red Sox GM Dan Duquette (*top*), whose insecurity, says Vaughn, has torn apart his team.

Sport: Are you nursing a grudge against the Red Sox?
Vaughn: I don't concentrate on that team. I think everybody in baseball finally understands what happened with me. And the Red Sox are going to continue to get criticism for it. So it doesn't do me any good, and it isn't even necessary for me to say anything, because people who know baseball know they're crazy in Boston anyway.
Sport: Sounds like you're still bitter about them.
Vaughn: I want people to understand that I loved playing in Boston. I wanted to finish my career there, and all the negativity came from only two people, Dan Duquette and [Red Sox CEO] John Harrington. When I go back to Fenway Park with the Angels and for the All-Star game, it won't be to get back at them. But I'll have emotions because I'll miss the fans and Boston. I'll definitely miss [manager] Jimy Williams. Jimy is a fine man who taught me a lot of baseball. But I won't ever miss the garbage that goes on in that organization.

Sport: Why was Duquette against you? Was it your arrest and trial for drunk driving?
Vaughn: It was his insecurity. Tell me, how many people have the Red Sox fired or lost since Dan Duquette came into the front office? We had some good people, and they're all gone ... Roger Clemens, Mike Greenwell, Jose Canseco. That's because of his insecurity. It's about players having too much power over him, too much leverage. He wants all the power. Look at how many people there now are Dan Duquette picks. He wants the team to be in his image.

Sport: Greenwell says Duquette wants his players to be "little robots."
Vaughn: Exactly. And let me tell you right now, baseball championships can't be won that way.

Sport: Haven't people said the same kind of thing about Yankees owner George Steinbrenner?
Vaughn: But he wants warriors, people who are winners, who know how to win. That's how the game is supposed to be played. If you see a car out there on the street and you want to buy it, you'll buy it even if it might not be in your budget. And if you have it, you'll keep it. The Red Sox had 15 days to negotiate with me and they didn't do it, so that pretty much put it where it is. They gave Pedro Martinez $80 million. They offered Bernie Williams $80 million. I would have signed for $80 million, whereas Bernie may have just been yanking them around. But, hey, if you want to make him that offer and not me, you can do what you want.

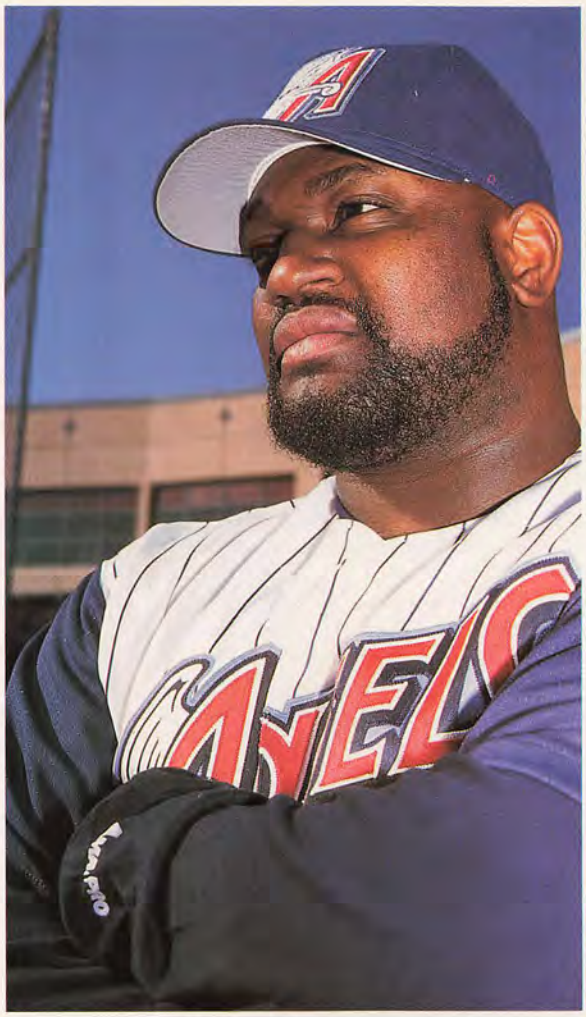
Sport: Their side of it is that all you originally asked for was what McGwire got—$28.5 million over three years—and then you turned down more than that.
Vaughn: I don't worry about their side.

Sport: Surprisingly, the Boston media, which always loved you, took Duquette's side, to the point that you had a confrontation with *The Boston Globe*'s Dan Shaughnessey after he dubbed you "Mo Money."
Vaughn: In the beginning they did that. But I think if you look at it now, you'll see that situation has totally turned, and even [Shaughnessey] would say I was proven right. When it comes to money, the players are always the ones who are going to take the

FROM TOP: TOM DIPACE; OTTO GREULE/ALLSPORT

heat. But now that the smoke has cleared, everybody's attitude in Boston has definitely changed. They understand that the Red Sox weren't bargaining in good faith.

Sport: Is it an absolute fact that the Red Sox had private investigators tailing you?
Vaughn: Fact. I found out about it because I have as many friends in the police there as the Red Sox, and this stuff gets back to you. When they're saying things about you and turning over stones trying to find stuff ... nobody should have to put up with that. The last straw was when they said I had to take a drinking evaluation. I told them, "If I've got to take a drinking evaluation, everybody in this damn organization's got to take one too." But by then, that was just an excuse to get rid of me, because they knew I'd say no. What happened was, at first I think they felt I was going to play in Boston no matter how they treated me. Then they began smearing my reputation to keep my salary down. Then they just wanted to get rid of me any way they could.



Sport: Can you categorically state that you don't have a drinking problem?
Vaughn: I don't think the Angels would have signed me if I did. In fact, [Angels GM] Bill Bavasi wrote me a letter when I was a free agent. It spoke about my character. That was gratifying, because as a player you don't know how other people see you. What the Red Sox said was just one point of view compared with all the other teams. All I know is this: When I went out on the field there, I gave 100 percent. When I had knee surgery, I was back playing 19 days later. I came to play every day, and that's all I can ask of myself.

I think of myself as a role model but not a saint. I'm a real person, and people are going to make mistakes. But when people say I have a problem, I say what's the problem? If I'm horse--- as a ballplayer, then you can talk to me about these things. But until I stop proving myself on the field, you've got to leave me alone.

Sport: Your father, who's an educator, said about you last year that you were "a 30-year-old kid, not a 30-year-old man." Is he right?
Vaughn: I don't know. If that means I still have things to learn, that's definitely the case. But let me tell you, I couldn't have made this change in my life at 25. Being 31 and having had some experience playing the game has really made me focused now. And one thing I know is that I'm not a bad person. I can get along with anyone and be able to make adjustments to any situation.

Sport: Can the Red Sox win without you?
Vaughn: I'll just say it this way: This game cannot be played on computers. The old school is much better than the new school. You can't evaluate people with computer chips. You can't evaluate character that way. They don't understand there that you've got to have some talent, sure, but you've got to have heart to take everything you have to deal with in baseball, because it will eat you up if you don't. ■

IN FACT
Vaughn is the only major-leaguer to hit .300 or better with at least 35 homers in each of the last four seasons.

FROM TOP: MICHAEL PONZINI; DAVID N. SEELIG

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Power Rangers Unite!

The Reunion of MVP Juan Gonzalez and All-Star Catcher Ivan Rodriguez With Rafael Palmeiro Means Trouble for the American League > By Mark D. Williams • Photo by Lisa Means

"YOU'RE STEALING MONEY FROM US," JUAN GONZALEZ SAYS IN A VOICE LOUD ENOUGH FOR THE ENTIRE clubhouse to hear. "Sign a big contract and sit around while we work hard." Two lockers away, teammate Ivan "Pudge" Rodriguez hoots support in Spanish. They are tag-teaming Rafael Palmeiro, who sits in a chair, his injured leg stuck out, wrapped in ice, shaking his head at his teammates' insinuations. He tugs uncomfortably at the ace bandage covering the knee he had 'scoped just weeks before.

Gonzalez and Rodriguez know how to get under their friend's skin. After all, Palmeiro is intensely proud that he's played in more games this decade than anybody not named Cal Ripken. Gonzalez smiles, and not the practiced pose-for-a-picture grin he owns. This one's ear-to-ear, the big smile that makes his dark eyes disappear into squints. He grabs Palmeiro's shoulders, squeezes, and through this gesture, apologizes. Pudge leans in, impishly winks at Palmeiro. All is forgotten.

Big Sticks: Rodriguez, Palmeiro and Gonzalez combined for 109 homers and 369 RBIs in '98.

If you didn't know better, you'd swear the three were brothers. They talk about how they're brothers. Though not related, Rodriguez and Gonzalez couldn't be happier that their compadre Palmeiro has returned to the Texas Rangers, where the three were teammates in the early 1990s.

Now the fun can begin again. The Rangers have won the AL West in two of the last three years, only to be knocked out by the Yankees each time. But with a trio as powerful as this—five players in all had more than 90 RBIs in '98, including left fielder Rusty Greer and third baseman Todd Zeile—can the Rangers take it to another level? The three huddle around their lockers. "Like Cleveland, we have to do it without an ace," says Palmeiro, addressing the Rangers' questionable starting pitching.

You can see it in Pudge's eyes. He wants more pitching. He and Gonzalez talked about it all off-season. They grew excited when they thought they might get either Randy Johnson or Roger Clemens. Pudge sighs, and says as convincingly as he can, "We have to win no matter what we have. We have to take it to the next level." Gonzalez nods in agreement: "We can do it."

!N FACT

Eighteen of the 21 players to hit at least 450 home runs are in the Hall of Fame. The three not in the Hall—Eddie Murray, Dave Winfield and Mark McGwire—are not yet eligible. The 450 mark is well within reach for both Palmeiro and Gonzalez (314 and 301 homers, respectively, going into the season).

GONZALEZ, RODRIGUEZ AND PALMEIRO share the same 24-hour baseball alarm clock. Gonzalez gets up at 3 a.m. every day to work out for three hours and then goes another round with the weights at 3 p.m. Pudge added nine pounds of muscle over the off-season so that he won't wilt down the stretch in the Texas heat. Palmeiro lifts weights, studies videos of his swing and of opposing pitchers, and hits for hours in his own batting cage. Gonzalez and Rodriguez are lifelong friends from the same hometown—Vega Baja, Puerto Rico. They played Little League ball against each other. Pudge was a pitcher then and threw four no-hitters one season. Says Gonzalez as he tussles Pudge's thick black hair, "He threw hard, and I hit him hard."

Gonzalez and Rodriguez. Their lives long intertwined, they have a hearty competition with each other. At times they've shared valets, agents, managers—when one gets a personal trainer, so does the other. They've had their spats with each other—public and private—but they always make up. Both speak with thick accents and the rat-a-tat-tat street Spanish of smalltown Puerto Rico. They insulate themselves from the swiftness of American culture with a buffer of family and friends. They understand English well, and speak it better than they let on. Yet another buffer.

Raffy is the big brother, Pudge and Juan acknowledge, and it's not just lip service. When rumors had Pudge being traded out of Texas after a contract stalemate between management and his agent in '97, an unhappy Rodriguez sought out Palmeiro. "Your agent works for you, not you for him," Palmeiro advised. Says Pudge, "He just told me to take things into my own hands." And Rodriguez did, marching into an impromptu closed-door meeting with Rangers management, leaving an hour later with a handshake deal for five years and $42 million.

As close as they are, the three don't spend time together away from the park. "Too much family, too much to do," says Pudge. Family is as important to each as their friendship. An extended member of their group is Luis Mayoral, the Rangers' director of Spanish broadcasting and Latin American liaison and confidante to the three. He saw them fight early battles with poor judgment and immaturity. "Gonzalez and Rodriguez have become warriors over the years," Mayoral says. "They are much more mature than before. Along with Raffy, they are leaders on this team."

Rangers hitting coach Rudy Jaramillo is ecstatic to have the three big bats in the middle of the lineup. They combined for 109 home runs and 369 RBIs last year, a Murderer's Row for the new millennium. "These guys are so good, my main jobs are to play psychotherapist and to help them with minor adjustments, then get out of the way," says Jaramillo. Pudge doesn't even attend the hitting meetings before each series. "We don't want to screw him up," Jaramillo says. "He has such great eye-to-hand coordination. He sees the ball, he hits the ball."

Rodriguez ranks among baseball's all-time best catchers. It could have to do with his dedication to the game. He got married and made it to the show on the same day. He loves baseball so much, for years he would play a full season for the Rangers, then suit up for another three months to play winter ball in Puerto Rico. Though only 27, Pudge can't take the pounding anymore, so he has given up off-season ball. He already owns five Silver Slugger awards to go with his seven consecutive All-Star appearances.

Of course, he plays a little defense too. In each of the last four seasons, Pudge has led the league in percentage of runners thrown out stealing. He scares opposing base runners into short leads with his frequent pickoff attempts to any and all bases. At home in Puerto Rico, he built 14 shelves for the number of Gold Gloves he wants to win in his career. Seven are filled thus far; Johnny Bench, with 10, is the only catcher with more. Why 14? In typical coy Pudge-ness, he says, "because that's how big the wall was."

Gonzalez may need a wall of his own. At 29, he has won two of the last three AL MVP awards. He has led the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RVP: SPORTS IMAGERY; DAVID DUROCHIK/SPORTPICS

AL in home runs twice and last year made a run at Hack Wilson's legendary record of 190 RBIs before finishing with 157. Gonzalez has reached 40 homers five times in eight full seasons. He reached 300 homers quicker than all but five players in major-league history. "Juan is the best line drive hitter in the game—no one else is even close," says Jaramillo.

The numbers, though, mean less to Gonzalez than his dream of one day becoming mayor of his hometown, the barrio of Alto de Cuba, an impoverished community Gonzalez visits daily in the off-season. "I will never forget my people," he says. "No matter how big I become, I will always remember where I came from."

What he won't say is that he provides these *pobres* with fiestas, supplies food during the holidays and is known on the island for his generosity. He and Rodriguez each gave $25,000 to the victims of Hurricane Georges last year.

Palmeiro is less acclaimed but no less determined than his teammates. Who knew, for example, that he entered '99 with more homers in the last three seasons (120) than All-Star first basemen Mo Vaughn (119) and Frank Thomas (104)? Palmeiro, 34, has been fighting his way out of the shadows his entire life.

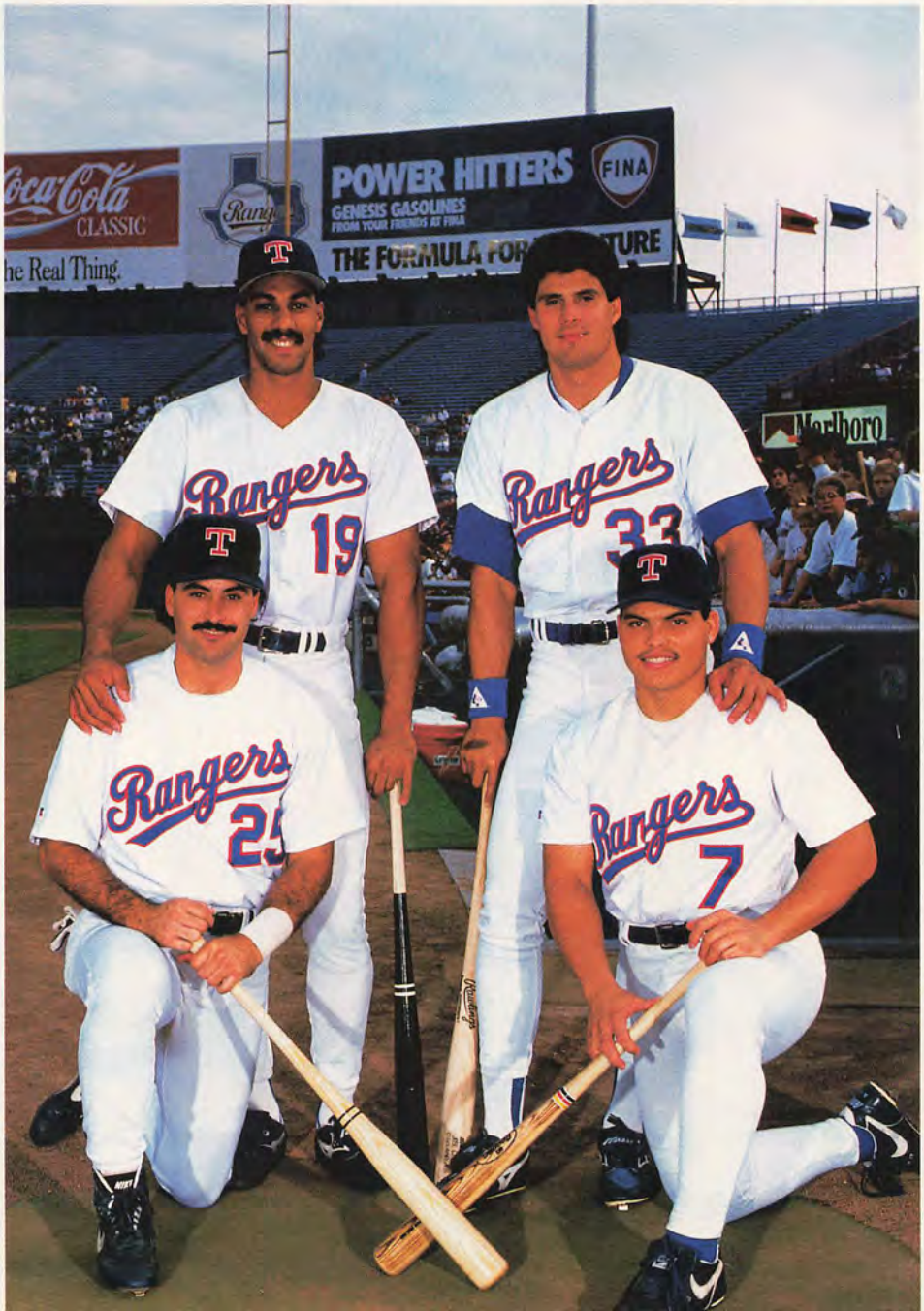
Palmeiro was born in Havana, Cuba, under the heavy hand of Fidel Castro's communist government. His family escaped to Florida when Palmeiro was 6. His father was a taskmaster, a trait evident in Raffy's own demeanor. "My father pushed me hard," he says. "He would work construction all day, come home, change clothes, then take my brother and me to the ball fields where he would make us hit and field until dark." Palmeiro's eyes glaze over when he talks about those days and his father. "He was tough, very critical. He knew my swing better than I did, better than any hitting coaches I have had."

Palmeiro has had a few coaches because, unlike Gonzalez and Rodriguez, he left Texas. He signed with Baltimore as a free agent after the 1993 season when the Rangers signed Will Clark in a deal that ruffled Raffy's feathers. His only regret is that the Ballpark in Arlington was built, with its short overhanging right-field porch, tailor-made for his left-handed stroke. Finally, Palmeiro has the chance to capitalize.

Still, that's not enough for Palmeiro. He wants to be greater than his father thought he could be, better than what he himself thinks he can be. "When I leave the field for the last time," he says, "I want to be remembered as one of the best players ever to have put on a uniform."

THE RANGERS HAVE TIME TO ENJOY what the three can do together. Gonzalez is signed through 1999 with an option for 2000, Pudge through 2002, Palmeiro 'til 2003. Contract extension talks for Gonzalez are already under way, and both he and Pudge hope to remain Rangers their entire careers. They want to finish as a trio, someday playing in the Series. "The only important thing is to get into and win the World Series," Gonzalez says. "Nothing else really matters."

During the lazy days of spring, the three talked about what lied ahead. The subject of Gonzalez's fielding came up. He has become steady by playing it safe, never diving, and he's unlikely to ever win a Gold Glove to match his friends. Pudge jumps in: "Hey, he's got the important one. We've just got his leftovers," referring to Gonzalez's two MVP trophies. Raffy smiles, slugs Juan on the arm, and in Spanish, they begin the business of being brothers again. ■

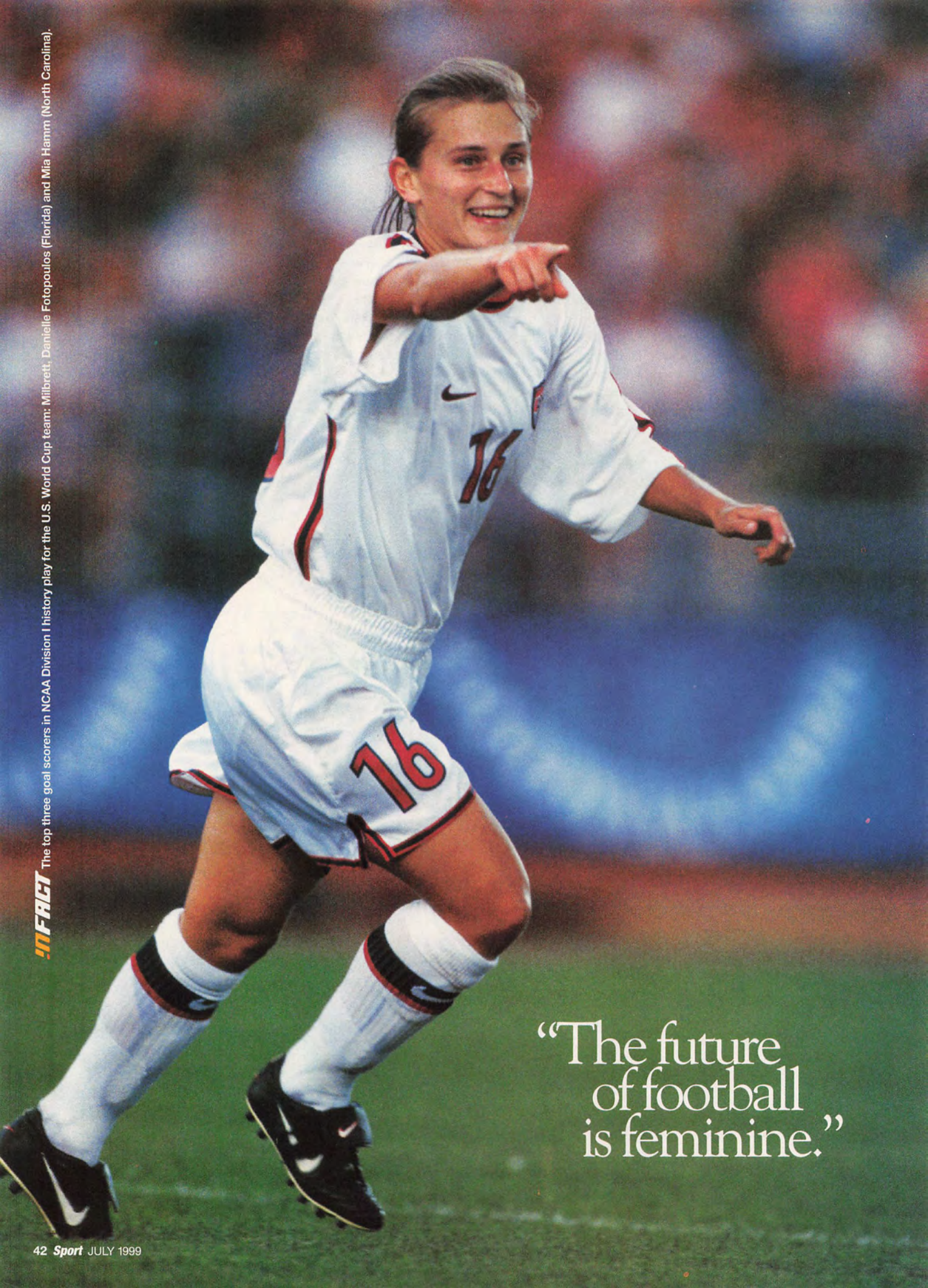


TOM DIPACE

Sign of the Times: The Power Rangers first teamed in 1991 and '92 alongside fellow slugger Jose Canseco (33).

OVERTIME

Gonzalez, Rodriguez, Palmeiro and the rest of the Rangers test their mettle against the defending-champion Yankees in New York on June 14-17. Keep up with the Rangers at www.texasrangers.com.



FACT The top three goal scorers in NCAA Division I history play for the U.S. World Cup team: Milbrett, Danielle Fotopoulos (Florida) and Mia Hamm (North Carolina).

All the World's a Stage

If You Haven't Seen World Cup Soccer Star Tiffeny Milbrett, You're Missing a Good Show > By Marty Dobrow

AT THE LAST WOMEN'S WORLD CUP, IN 1995, Tiffeny Milbrett punctuated her scores with a signature flying somersault. "I was on a goal roll," she explains. Her scores last year for the U.S. national team prompted an Irish jig. "I absolutely love the *Riverdance*."

So what's it going to be this year? As the third women's World Cup comes to the States this summer, what's the next dance step for the host country's most expressive scorer? For once, Milbrett is uncertain, saying she's "kind of in transition." Expect something—with Milbrett there's never a dull goal—and expect to see it a lot. "I was just a born goal scorer," she says. "It's not so much a mentality. It just is."

When women's soccer became an Olympic sport in 1996, it just was. Milbrett scored the decisive goal in the gold-medal game, giving the U.S. a 2-1 victory over China before more than 75,000 fans. Swirling with glee, she didn't consider the significance of scoring the most famous goal in the history of the women's game. Since then, however .... "I've had brief moments of thinking, 'Wow, how cool was that?' "

Her first goals came in far more obscure circumstances. Growing up in the small town of Hillsboro, Ore. ("not really Podunky," she insists), she learned the game from her mother. Elsie Milbrett-Parham is not a soccer mom in the passive sense—she plays the sport herself. Elsie's team was occasionally short a player or two in practice, so 10-year-old Tiffeny would charge onto the field, determined to blaze past a familiar defender. "We would just go at it tooth and nail," her mom laughs.

Milbrett was just as tough on opponents her own age. Her soccer savvy and quickness enabled the 5-foot-2 whiz to finish in the top five nationally in scoring all four years at the University of Portland. Milbrett's 103 career goals tied Mia Hamm's NCAA record (since broken by current World Cup teammate Danielle Fotopoulos of Florida).

With the U.S. national team, she has hardly missed a beat. She cracked the starting lineup in the '95 World Cup and has since become the team's No. 2 scorer right behind Hamm. Against Australia in 1997, she set a U.S. record with five assists in a single game. The goals have come in gobs, usually followed by a flourish. "This is her," says U.S. coach Tony DiCicco. "You can see her personality in every game. You can see her joy when she scores and her frustration when she's denied. It's fun to watch. She has a great essence out on the field."

Milbrett & Co. will be center stage when the host U.S. kicks it with the world.

The game has grown up around her. In the 1990s, women's soccer has won fans with its appealing blend of finesse and team play. In the Olympic Games, Milbrett says the crowd support was "really, really, really shockingly wonderful." FIFA president Sepp Blatter has gone so far as to say, "The future of football is feminine."

Still, there is considerable pressure to build on the Olympic momentum with this summer's Games. There's a lot at stake. The World Cup represents the best chance for women's soccer players to have a league of their own in the United States. At big-city venues from New York to Los Angeles, the product will be paraded before fans and sponsors. Enough of a groundswell could save tomorrow's stars from having to pack their cleats for Japan, as Milbrett did for three years.

There is also the issue of sports sisterhood. The play isn't the only thing; there's also the cause. "Women's athletics are always on this non-stop march to gain respect and legitimacy," Milbrett says. While she yearns to recapture the World Cup title from Norway, she says that the deepest significance of the Games is "showing our country, as well as the world, how excited people are to watch women's athletics and women's soccer."

But if you really want to see excitement, remember to catch Milbrett after a goal. "I like to express myself," she says. "I'm energetic, just a ball of fire." ■

The Star Report

Yes, the United States has Hamm and some green eggs (standouts like Milbrett, Julie Foudy, Michelle Akers and Briana Scurry), but soccer fans will like these international stars on a boat, with a goat, in a box, with a fox ....

1. MARIANNE PETTERSEN, NORWAY, FORWARD–Unknown if she can score at sea, but she's great on the ground and in the air.

2. SUN WEN, CHINA, MIDFIELD–Midfield wizard scored the Chinese goal in the Olympic gold-medal game.

3. ROSELI, BRAZIL, FORWARD–Singular name, singular game; feisty forward is hard to mark.

4. ULRIKA KARLSSON, SWEDEN, GOALIE–Tremendous instincts; better on the angles than the best geometry teachers.

5. CHARMAINE HOOPER, CANADA, FORWARD–Hooper was super in February, scoring both goals as a team of international all-stars beat the U.S., 2-1.

World Beaters

While men's soccer in the United States is still deep on its own side of the field, the U.S. women are peppering the opposing goal. Coach Tony DiCicco's squad will be the favorite this summer as it hosts the third women's World Cup. Still, the international talent gap has closed considerably since the United States won the inaugural event in 1991. Here are five teams to watch:

1. NORWAY–The U.S.'s archrival and 1995 World Cup champs are lethal on the long ball.

2. CHINA–Disciplined and opportunistic, the Chinese topped the U.S. for the Algarve Cup in March.

3. BRAZIL–Scrappy squad means fans of the men's team in Rio won't be the only Brazil nuts.

4. GERMANY–Physicality and finesse create challenging matchups for most opponents.

5. SWEDEN–Rugged Scandinavian style and a keeper of a keeper make Swedes a threat.

OVERTIME

The women's World Cup will be carried live by ABC, ESPN and ESPN2, starting on June 19.

OPPOSITE: RICH KANE; INSET: JOHN CHAPMAN

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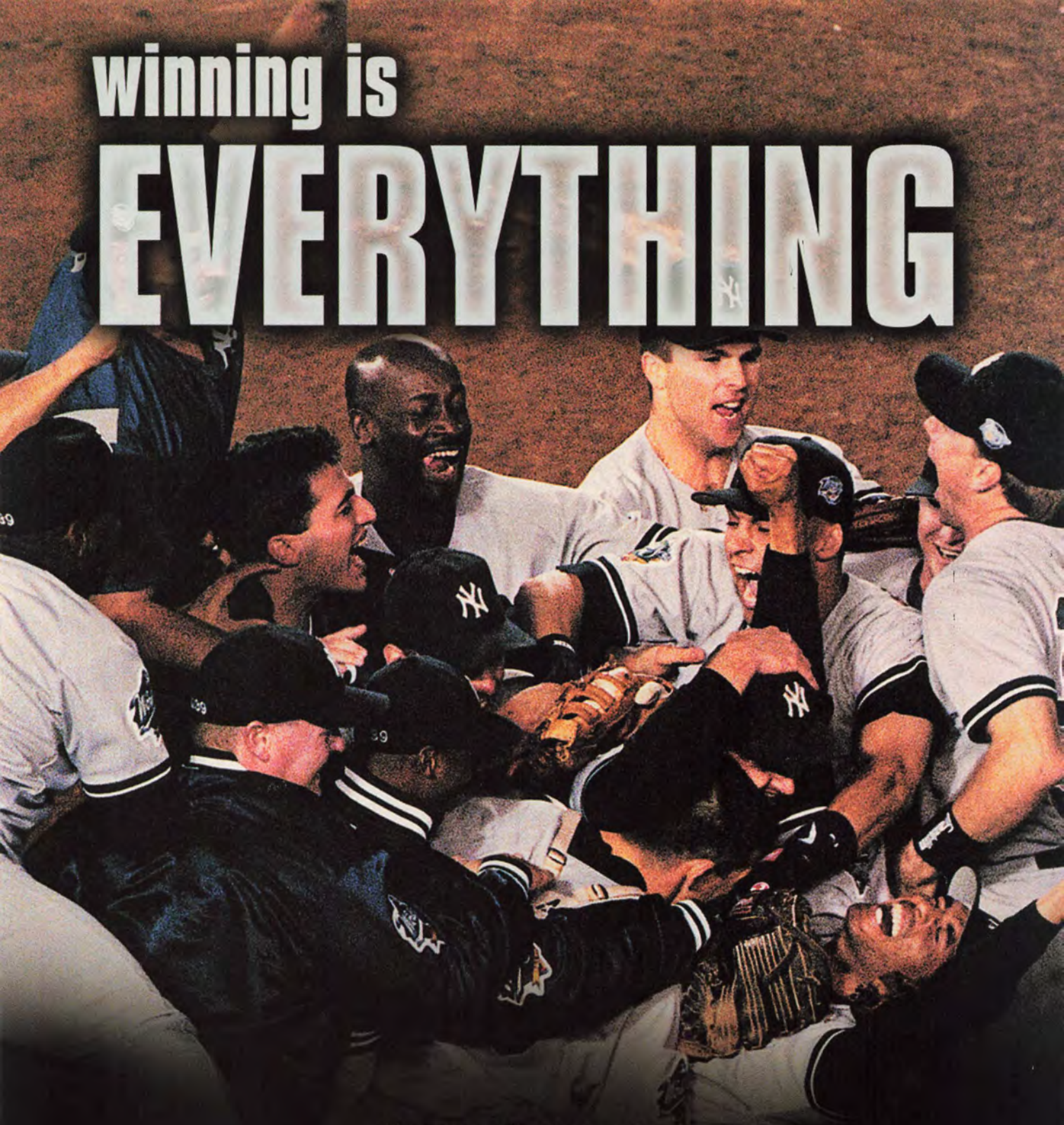

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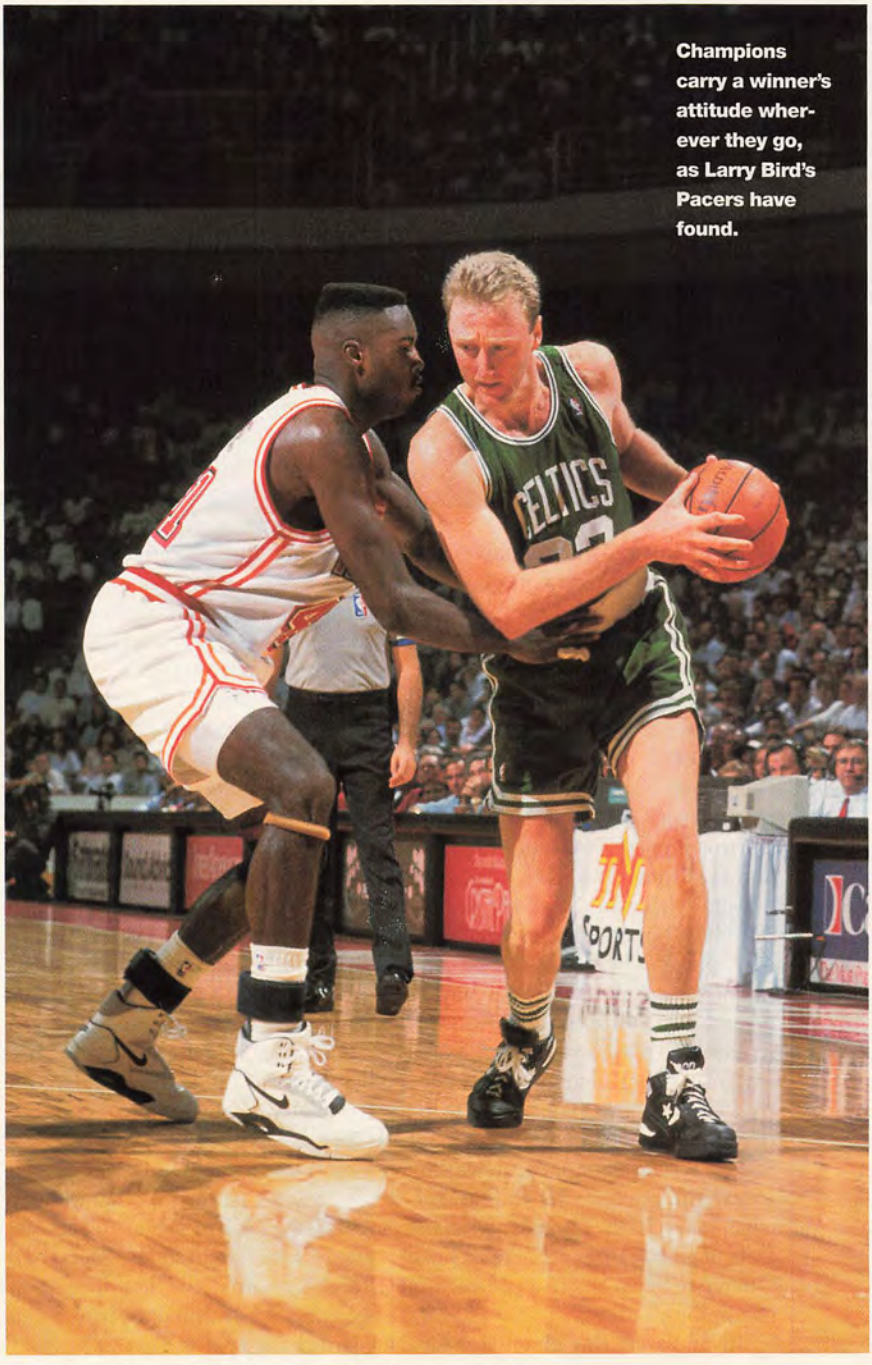
Victory's SECRETS

Want to Know What It Takes to Win an NBA Title? These Guys Have The Formula > By Darryl Howerton



Champions carry a winner's attitude wherever they go, as Larry Bird's Pacers have found.

AL MESSERSCHMIDT

AL HARRINGTON HAS STAYED AFTER SCHOOL for some extra study time. The teacher, Indiana Pacers head coach Larry Bird, is at the top of the perimeter matching three-pointer for three-pointer with the prized pupil, whom the Pacers took with the 25th pick in last year's draft. Harrington is 5-for-5 from beyond the arc, as is Bird ... or so it seems.

"You only made four," says the 19-year-old power forward from Elizabeth, N.J., who measures in at 6-foot-9, 230 pounds, roughly the same build as Larry Legend. The youngster explains: "That first one didn't count because we hadn't officially started yet. You've gotta shoot again."

"I don't gotta do anything," says Bird, "but if it makes you happy .... " The legend then toes the line and prepares to launch another trey. "HEY!" shouts the kid, trying to startle Bird as he leaves his feet for the jumper.

"Hey, what?" replies Bird, matter-of-factly on his way down. The ball swishes through the net.

"OK, now let's go over here," says Bird, taking Harrington a few steps over to the right for more schooling. "Don't let him take you there, Al," says Pacers star shooting guard Reggie Miller, pedaling on a nearby stationary bike. Bird swishes the first. Harrington's shot rattles around the rim and rolls out. Bird swishes the second. Harrington rims it again. For fun, Bird banks in his third. Harrington's

a drummer—another rim shot.

Bird continues to school the youngster, next taking his customary drop-step backward to drain a 27-footer. Miller admonishes the teen: "What'd I tell ya, Al? You can't go to that spot with him."

Just another day of education for the freshman Pacer. Today's subject (as is every day's): *What it takes to be a champion: practice, practice, practice.* Case in point: Though practice officially ended 45 minutes ago, Bird and assistant coaches Dick Harter and Rick Carlisle took seats in the stands and continued to strategize, while all 12 Pacers stayed on the floor, shooting three-pointers, pull-up jumpers, free throws.

Everyone remained on the floor for at least 30 more minutes. After a few departed, leaving one shooter without a rebounder, Bird left his perch in the stands to caddie for center Sam Perkins, who was working on his threes. Bird fed him for 10 minutes until Perkins hit the showers. That's when Bird had some fun with Harrington.

What other coach, especially in this lockout-shortened season, hangs around for an extra hour with his players? What other players desire to hang around with their coach for an extra hour? Welcome to the other side of the league. The what's-right-with-pro-basketball side.

"This is a great team to be around because they know what it takes to win. They work," says Carlisle. "I've been around a lot of questionable characters in my 10 years as a coach. New Jersey had some different guys and so did Portland. It's not an easy situation to deal with. To win championships, you need quality people with a passion to play and practice. Passion, with character factored in, beats talent and questionable attitudes more often than not."

Bird and other champs-turned-coaches have earned respect by having won titles.

IN FACT

Every NBA title team since 1984, the first year of the current 16-team playoff format, has had four of its top five players (based on minutes) together for at least three full seasons, and its top eight players have averaged at least six years of NBA experience. The only teams to meet those criteria this year: Indiana and Utah.

EVERY SEASON, SOME 400 PLAYERS strive for a goal that few ever achieve: an NBA championship. There are just 33 active players who have tasted championship champagne, and 30 of them were basically role players on their title teams. Scottie Pippen, Hakeem Olajuwon and Joe Dumars are the only active players with rings to have earned All-NBA honors in a season. That's why players like Harrington and Perkins glean as much from Bird as possible. For all their countless differences, all players are alike in wanting to get that championship edge that few will ever have. "The thing that separates champions from great players is that champions are willing to pay the price, to get that knowledge," says Isiah Thomas, who led Detroit to two titles. "There's a huge difference between great players and champions."

In Indiana, the championship-hungry are Bird-watchers—they hang on his every word, never get sick of his voice. The Bird-watchers know he runs five miles a day, so they, too, add extra cardio work to their programs. That's why, to a man, the Pacers all say they're in the best shape of their lives. The Bird-watchers see the professionalism of their boss. Bird doesn't tolerate lateness, and upon arrival last year, he instituted heavy fines for all offenders. "It took care of the problem right away," says Carlisle. Teammates will never forget when Travis Best and Dale Davis were left on the airport tarmac for being three minutes late for a charter flight before a 1997 preseason game. They were never late again.

Bird-watching, and absorbing, is really no different than what went on in Chicago with Michael Jordan or in Los Angeles with Magic Johnson. These players had The Aura, so it's only natural that their habits were mimicked. To a lesser degree, the same was true of the impacts had by Pippen, Olajuwon and Thomas.

"Players respect people who have won championships," says Lakers head coach Kurt Rambis, who earned four championship rings as the consummate power forward for L.A. in the '80s. "I know I did. Teams with talent look to coaches and players who have been in those types of environments. They trust that experience will help them in guiding their teams, putting them in a situation where they have a chance to win. You respect people who have been to war before."

Is it any wonder that five of the top teams of 1999 were coached by men tested by those Lakers-Celtics-Pistons championship rivalries of the '80s and early '90s? Bird's Pacers, Pat Riley's Heat, Chuck Daly's Magic, Rambis' Lakers and Mike Dunleavy's Trail Blazers all immediately transformed into their new leaders' likenesses once these coaches came on board.

In Los Angeles, the Lakers showed immediate improvement in rebounding and help-side defense thanks to the influence of Rambis. In seasons past, Shaquille O'Neal and other Lakers big men never challenged the point guard coming off a screen at the perimeter. That was one reason the Jazz's pick-and-roll consistently beat the Lakers. But then Rambis showed the importance of stepping up and making the point guard change paths.

STEVE LIPOFSKY

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Charles Barkley says a title is just a matter of time for Brian Grant and Portland.

Victory's secrets haven't been limited to L.A. and Indiana. Dunleavy, a role-playing shooter on two NBA Finals teams and a coach on another, transformed a team formerly referred to as the Jail Blazers into a young, deep squad that now readily accepts its roles. The Blazers have become, in the words of Charles Barkley, "the deepest team in the league." Says Barkley: "It's just a matter of time before they win a championship, if they keep their heads together."

Daly, who fashioned championships in Detroit with a terrific trio in the backcourt backed by bad-boy big men, is doing the same in Orlando. Darrell Armstrong, Penny Hardaway and Nick Anderson are supplying the gas, and Ike Austin, Bo Outlaw and Horace Grant are providing the muscle.

As for Riley, he's done his best to combine his two former worlds in Miami, merging Lakers finesse with Knicks thuggery and helping Tim Hardaway and Alonzo Mourning elevate their games.

"I can only speak for the ones I've worked with," says the Pacers' Harter, who worked for Daly in Detroit and Riley in New York. "Larry, Pat and Chuck are all very good with people and understand what makes them work. They're very quick to see what's going on around them. I don't mean just during a game but with the team. They all believe in fundamentals and hard work rather than gimmicks."

Most of victory's secrets are rather basic. Take, for example, Bird's Likes and Dislikes:

Likes: Experience and stability—two constants Bird enjoyed as a player in Boston and now as a coach in Indiana. "It always helps if you have guys who've been around together, who know each other," Bird says. "Other teams always think you can add somebody to make them better."

Dislikes: Change for the sake of change. "We would like to do that sometimes, but I felt these guys deserved another shot to try to win it all because of the way they played last year, how they were committed in the off-season and the way they went about things."

Likes: Good, hard play for "40-45 minutes a game."

Dislikes: Anything less than 30 minutes of good, hard play (he really does

STEVE D. PAOLA/NBA PHOTOS

break it down by the minute). "If they can play at least 30-35 minutes of solid basketball, and if they're really into it, they can win a majority of those games. When we only get it for 20, that's when we struggle."

Likes: Veterans accepting the challenge of playing on the road, which the Pacers have done very well the last two seasons. Bird's Celtics would yearn for road tests.
Dislikes: Veterans who circle dates on their schedules and say, "Of the next five games, we need to win three or four or whatever .... That's one thing I don't like. I expect them to go out every night and try to improve as we go along."

Likes: Respect. He demands it.
Dislikes: Getting the credit for the Pacers' success. "These players got to the Eastern Conference finals before I even got here," he says. That's why certain players, like Mark Jackson, suggest that we should not make too much of the Bird factor. As much as they like and respect their coach, it's players like Miller and Jackson who assume the true leadership roles.

"I try to lead by example, and Mark's more vocal," says Miller. "It's a good fit. Good cop, bad cop. He does all the talking and I give all the dirty looks." Adds Jackson: "Years ago, I watched guys like Magic and Isiah, watched how they ran a team through thick and thin. Saw how they didn't get caught up in numbers, and I patterned my game after that. When Larry came, I was able to take in his calmness, his presence, his professionalism, his leading by having a been-there-done-that attitude. But when we're playing, I'm the one leading this team. Same thing with Reggie and the others. We're the ones who have to get it done on the court. We're the ones who need to find ways to make things happen down the stretch when it counts on both ends of the floor. No secrets there."

Taking a cue from Magic and Bird, Mark Jackson says he doesn't concern himself with numbers.

Bird wouldn't have it any other way. "We try to motivate them," he says, "but in the end, it's up to the players. They're the ones who have to be in that championship mind-set all season. We can only prepare them. Then they're on their own."

That's when you find out who's in on the secrets. ■

OVERTIME

For insights into Larry Bird, read ***Larry Legend***, by Mark Shaw (Masters Press). For history on the championship, check out ***The NBA Finals: A Fifty-Year Celebration,*** by Roland Lazenby (Masters Press).

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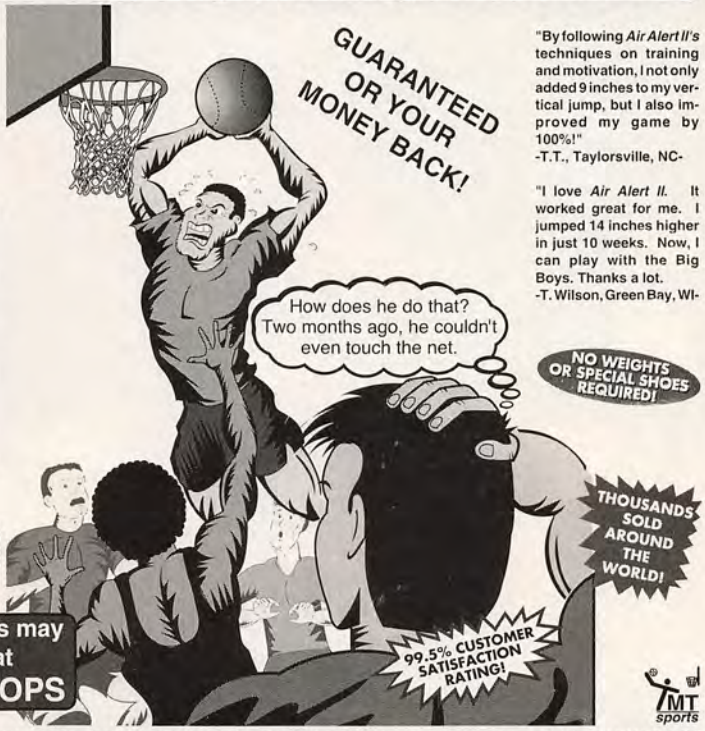
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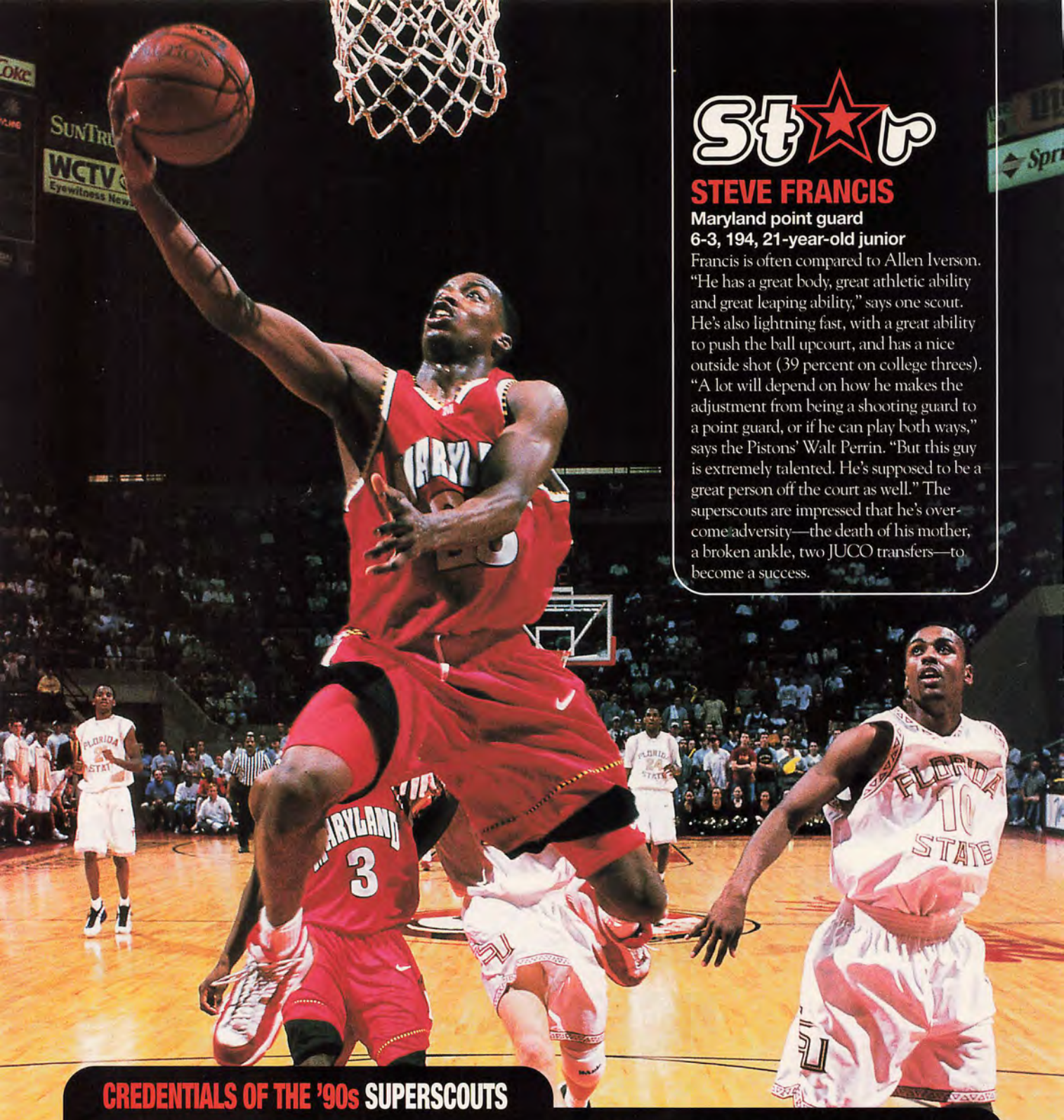


Star

STEVE FRANCIS

Maryland point guard
6-3, 194, 21-year-old junior

Francis is often compared to Allen Iverson. "He has a great body, great athletic ability and great leaping ability," says one scout. He's also lightning fast, with a great ability to push the ball upcourt, and has a nice outside shot (39 percent on college threes). "A lot will depend on how he makes the adjustment from being a shooting guard to a point guard, or if he can play both ways," says the Pistons' Walt Perrin. "But this guy is extremely talented. He's supposed to be a great person off the court as well." The superscouts are impressed that he's overcome adversity—the death of his mother, a broken ankle, two JUCO transfers—to become a success.

CREDENTIALS OF THE '90s SUPERSCOUTS

- Mitch Kupchak (general manager) of the Lakers has teamed with right-hand man Jerry West to turn picks Nos. 10, 12, 13#, 15, 24, 27, 29#, 37 and 48 into Eddie Jones, George Lynch, Kobe Bryant, Anthony Peeler, Derek Fisher, Elden Campbell, Travis Knight, Nick Van Exel and Cedric Ceballos.
- Donnie Walsh (president) of the Pacers has a roster of nine of his own draft picks and in this decade has turned picks Nos. 10, 13, 23, 25 and 45 into Erick Dampier, Dale Davis, Travis Best, Al Harrington and Antonio Davis.
- Walt Perrin (director of college scouting), in his seven years with the Pistons, has seen his team turn picks Nos. 3, 10, 11, 18, 26 and 58 into Grant Hill, Lindsey Hunter, Allan Houston, Theo Ratliff, Jerome Williams and Don Reid.
- Chris Wallace (general manager), in his two years with the Celtics, has seen his team turn picks Nos. 3, 6 and 10 into Chauncey Billups, Ron Mercer and Paul Pierce.
- Ladell Andersen (basketball consultant) works for the Jazz, an organization run by Scott Layden, which boasts three of the best second-round picks in the '90s in Shandon Anderson, Bryon Russell and Isaac Austin.
- Robert Barr (senior executive VP of basketball affairs) of the Rockets has helped turn picks Nos. 11, 14, 24, 30 and 41 into Robert Horry, Michael Dickerson, Sam Cassell, Othella Harrington and Cuttino Mobley.

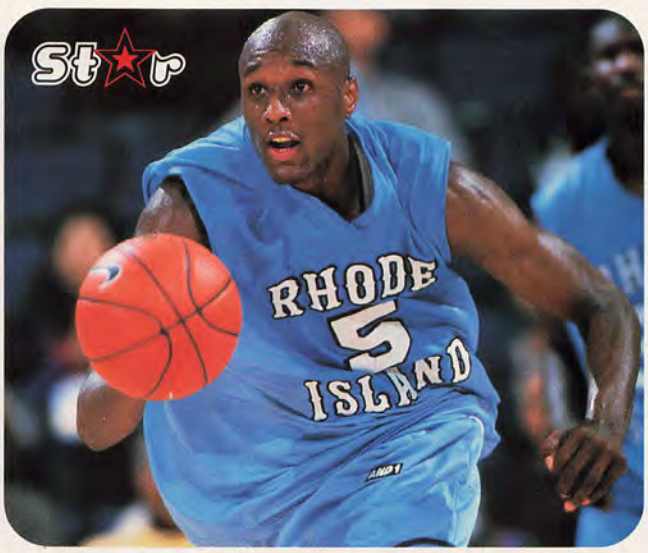
 # denotes player was drafted by another team but acquired before his rookie season began

PAUL CHAPMAN/BRSP

Wish Upon a Star

The NBA Draft's Big Secret Is a Little Surprising: Few Picks Become True Stars.
NBA Insiders Reveal the Players They One Day Expect to Soar > By Darryl Howerton

LET'S SEE IF WE'VE GOT THIS STRAIGHT: YOU THINK YOUR favorite NBA team is only a star away from turning it around, and that's where the draft comes in, right? Hate to put a Latrell-hold on your dreams, but that's not how it works. Just be happy if you get someone who will play about half the game over his career. No kidding. Recent history suggests that only about 15 players chosen will average at least 24 minutes a game in their careers, and only about three of those will play in three or more All-Star games. That's right, just three stars in the bunch. So we broke down this year's prospects—*all* prospects, regardless of whether they declared for the '99 draft—into "star" and "player" categories. Then we turned to the NBA front-office experts who've drafted well in the '90s for a peek inside their notebooks. Some declined to talk about specific players, some requested anonymity only on certain subjects, and others were willing to speak freely. Here's what the pros know about the guys who can help your team.



FROM LEFT: ALLEN KEE/BRSP; ROCKY WIDNER

COREY MAGGETTE

Duke shooting guard
6-6, 210, 19-year-old freshman

Mike Krzyzewski will be the new punch line to the updated riddle: Name the only man to hold Maggette under a dozen points. By playing limited minutes (18 per game), the freshman's explosiveness (speed, jumping ability) remained somewhat of a secret ... to all but the superscouts. "He's already great. I think he's a can't-miss," says a scout. "Love that body," says another. "Don't use my name when talking about him because I don't want to entice him out. But I love him."

LAMAR ODOM

Rhode Island small forward
6-9, 220, 19-year-old sophomore

All-around talent Odom has a good enough handle to be a Scottie Pippen-like point forward, but the same questions surround him that surrounded Pippen as a youngster. "I think he's a very talented player," says the Pacers' Donnie Walsh. "I want to see how he takes physical play. But he's young, and that's normal for young players." Says Perrin: "Odom played extremely hard this year and raised his stock, even though he didn't have to play at Rhode Island to get drafted. There were questions coming out of high school about whether he played hard, but he showed people he does."

TERENCE MORRIS

Maryland small forward
6-9, 205, 20-year-old sophomore

Morris has been brought along slowly—not highly touted as a high schooler, a sub as a college freshman—but now has the attention of the superscouts. "I think he's a better prospect than Francis," says one. "He's got upside," says Walsh. "Reminds me of Derrick McKey when Derrick was young. He really knows how to play." A good outside shooter (35 percent on college threes), Morris also has the athleticism to make the nightly highlight reels.

ELTON BRAND

Duke power forward
6-8, 260, 20-year-old sophomore

"Everyone's gonna say he's too little to play down low, but I think this guy's gonna do it," says Walsh. "I think he's got more skills than people will give him credit for." Says Perrin: "I could see him playing a lot as a rookie." And a scout requesting anonymity: "One thing I've heard and observed a little bit: There are times when he's a little lazy. You have to be concerned about that." Others, however, counter that he showed courage in coming back from a freshman foot injury that kept him out of 15 games. "I think he's somewhere between a Charles Barkley and a Corliss Williamson," says a scout. "Maybe closer to Barkley."

WALLY SZCZERBIAK

Miami (Ohio) small forward
6-8, 241, 22-year-old senior

Szczerbiak has drawn comparisons to Glen Rice, Tom Gugliotta and Dan Majerle, all tall, straight shooters. "He may be a Majerle," says Walsh. "I think he's gonna be a 10-year player. Whether he can be a star, I'm not sure yet." Says Perrin: "He's strong, can take it to the hole and finish. Because he can shoot the ball well, he'll play a lot." Says the Jazz's Ladell Andersen: "If I was in the lottery every year, I'd do what the Suns did in the late '80s: Draft and trade for great shooters and scorers. When they got Tom Chambers, Dan Majerle, Jeff Hornacek, Eddie and Kevin Johnson, they quickly became a 55-win team."

THE REAL WORLD

Already an NBA Vet at Age 20, Portland's Jermaine O'Neal Epitomizes the Mediocrity of the Prep Star-Turned-Pro

The sight of 17-year-old Jermaine O'Neal at his introductory Portland Trail Blazers news conference three years ago caused beat writers in attendance to snap the tips off their pencils in shock. Into the room strode a man's body—6 feet, 10 inches in all—that tapered toward a child's face and the skinniest pair of shoulders this side of Richie Cunningham. For a long moment you could have heard a pin drop. Then the cameras finally began to click.

The Blazers spent the No. 17 pick in the 1996 NBA draft on O'Neal, who at the time was mere moments removed from Eau Claire High in Columbia, S.C. Most of the chatter surrounding prep stars who jump straight to the pros revolves around the possibility of either their spectacular success (exemplified by, say, Kobe Bryant) or failure (Taj McDavid anyone?). But statistically, the more likely scenario is mediocrity: If the current trend continues, by the next decade the NBA will contain a dozen or more post-pubescent professionals who are neither busts nor established.

Of these, O'Neal is the poster boy. Already a three-year NBA vet at age 20, O'Neal inhabits a sort of no-man's-land between star and scrub, adolescent and adult. He has grown an inch and added 35 pounds of muscle, mostly around his neck and those shoulders. Yet no one would describe O'Neal as physically mature. The Blazers have not given up on the possibility that he could be a featured player, but they haven't extended his contract either. Minutes have been scarce. "All I'm hearing is, 'Be patient,' " O'Neal says. "I'm trying, but it's tough. In Portland it rains so much. You get a lot of time to think. I try to figure out every night, What can I do to put me in the right position to play?"

O'Neal insists he has no regrets about forgoing college and that the game is still fun for him. But the reality of his situation clearly is starting to dawn on him. "I prefer not to be a 'just-in-case player,' but right now that's what I am to the team," he says.

O'Neal's mom has a photograph from that first news conference on the wall of her South Carolina home. At the sight of it, O'Neal shakes his head. The person in the frame was "very, very young mentally, very uneducated about life in general," O'Neal says. "A kid who just wanted to experience a new part of life."

That he has. It's called the real world.

—Sam Silverstein

BARON DAVIS

UCLA point guard
6-2½, 190, 20-year-old sophomore

Many were impressed by how well Davis recovered from a freshman ACL injury. His physical nature is more conducive to the NBA than college, where his aggressiveness got him into frequent foul trouble. "He's much more athletic than I thought he was," says Walsh. "If his leg's OK," adds Perrin, "he's gonna be pretty good. He's a high-energy guy. Besides having the talent, he plays hard." His outside shot, once a concern, improved greatly in his sophomore season.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAMIE SQUIRE/ALLSPORT; ALLEN KEE/BRSP; BRIAN SPURLOCK; TODD WARSHAW/ALLSPORT

RICHARD HAMILTON

Connecticut shooting guard
6-6, 185, 21-year-old junior

Meet Reggie Miller—at least, that's what the guy who drafted Miller sees. "I think he's gonna be a can't-miss as a shooting guard," says Walsh. "He's 185 pounds like Reggie. The question is: Is he as tough as Reggie? But I'm impressed by what I've seen. In the playoffs, he put his team on his back and carried them. That's great mental toughness. That's the kind of stuff Reggie would do." Like Miller, Hamilton knows how to run by screens. "His background is impeccable," says Perrin. "He's from a fairly close-knit family in a blue-collar town, so you know he's gonna work hard and be the best player he can be."

ANDRE MILLER

Utah point guard
6-2, 204, 23-year-old senior

An outstanding decision-maker, Miller most impresses superscouts with his acceleration into an extra gear on the break. "He takes it right to the big guys," says Walsh. Says another scout: "Here's a kid from Compton who goes to Salt Lake City. Not many people can do that." His college coach, Rick Majerus, says he plays and practices with a passion. "We love to hear that," says Perrin. Says the Rockets' Robert Barr: "You know what you get when you draft mature seniors. With a veteran team like we have, it makes it easier to fit in older rookies." Houston picks Rodrick Rhodes, Michael Dickerson, Bryce Drew and Cuttino Mobley were all 23 when drafted.

BRENDAN HAYWOOD

North Carolina center
7-0, 265, 19-year-old sophomore

Haywood is a strong finisher when he gets near the basket. Just ask any ACC center. "He had them all ducking," says Walsh. "He's a good shot-blocker too. They were all afraid to shoot the ball. I think he's got a great future." Says another scout: "He needs to mature, but all 19-year-olds do. He's gonna be good. You can't teach some of the stuff he does." And another: "He's a very athletic big man, which is always hard to find. The more he learns, the more his stock will rise."

WILLIAM AVERY

Duke point guard
6-2, 180, 19-year-old sophomore

Avery is a converted two guard who plays the point well enough to have superscouts excited about his future. He has a good outside shot (37 percent on college threes) and the athleticism that could make him a nice combo guard. Says one scout: "In Duke's program, you play hard or you don't play at all. He can drive, dish and shoot with the best of them." Great quickness will make him a good on-the-ball defender.

IN FACT **Allen Iverson is the only guard in the '80s or '90s to be selected with the first overall pick in an NBA draft.**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALLEN KEE/BRSP; JON SOOHOO; BRUCE L. SCHWARTZMAN; ROCKY WIDNER

HISTORY 101

To show how few "stars" and "players" are produced each draft, we listed every active '90s draftee who has averaged at least 24 minutes per game in his career, our definition of a "player." For fun, we ranked those draftees in order of how their careers have gone in the past and may go in the future. Draftees who have played in or who we think will play in at least three All-Star games before their careers end—our definition of a "star"—are in bold.

 # denotes player was drafted by another team but acquired before his rookie season began

1990
1 "Star" and 13 "Players"
Gary Payton (Sonics/No. 2)
Jayson Williams (76ers#/No. 21)
Toni Kukoc (Bulls/No. 29)
Derrick Coleman (Nets/No. 1)
Antonio Davis (Pacers/No. 45)
Elden Campbell (Lakers/No. 27)
Kendall Gill (Hornets/No. 5)
Tyrone Hill (Warriors/No. 11)
Loy Vaught (Clippers/No. 13)
Cedric Ceballos (Suns/No. 48)
Dennis Scott (Magic/No. 4)
Dee Brown (Celtics/No. 19)
Terry Mills (Nuggets#/No. 16)
Bimbo Coles (Heat#/No. 40)

1991
3 "Stars" and 11 "Players"
Dikembe Mutombo (Nuggets/No. 4)
Steve Smith (Heat/No. 5)
Terrell Brandon (Cavs/No. 11)
Larry Johnson (Hornets/No. 1)
Kenny Anderson (Nets/No. 2)
Dale Davis (Pacers/No. 13)
Rick Fox (Celtics/No. 24)
Darrell Armstrong (undrafted)
Bobby Phills (Bucks/No. 45)
Billy Owens (Kings/No. 3)
Luc Longley (T-Wolves/No. 7)
Isaac Austin (Jazz/No. 48)
Bison Dele (Magic/No. 10)
Stacey Augmon (Hawks/No. 9)

1992
4 "Stars" and 13 "Players"
Shaquille O'Neal (Magic/No. 1)
Alonzo Mourning (Hornets/No. 2)
Tom Gugliotta (Wizards/No. 6)
Latrell Sprewell (Warriors/No. 24)
Christian Laettner (T-Wolves/No. 3)
Jimmy Jackson (Mavs/No. 4)
LaPhonso Ellis (Nuggets/No. 5)
PJ Brown (Nets/No. 29)
Doug Christie (Sonics/No. 17)
Robert Horry (Rockets/No. 11)
Walt Williams (Kings/No. 7)
Clarence Weatherspoon (76ers/No. 9)
Matt Geiger (Heat/No. 42)
Bryant Stith (Nuggets/No. 13)
Anthony Peeler (Lakers/No. 15)
Popeye Jones (Mavs#/No. 41)
Oliver Miller (Suns/No. 22)

1993
4 "Stars" and 11 "Players"
Chris Webber (Warriors#/No. 1)
Penny Hardaway (Magic#/No. 3)
Allan Houston (Pistons/No. 11)
Vin Baker (Bucks/No. 8)
Sam Cassell (Rockets/No. 24)
Jamal Mashburn (Mavs/No. 4)
Nick Van Exel (Lakers/No. 37)
Bryon Russell (Jazz/No. 45)
J.R. Rider (T-Wolves/No. 5)
Chris Mills (Cavs/No. 22)

Shawn Bradley (76ers/No. 2)
Calbert Cheaney (Wizards/No. 6)
Rodney Rogers (Nuggets/No. 9)
George Lynch (Lakers/No. 12)
Lindsey Hunter (Pistons/No. 10)

1994
2 "Stars" and 11 "Players"
Grant Hill (Pistons/No. 3)
Jason Kidd (Mavs/No. 2)
Eddie Jones (Lakers/No. 10)
Glenn Robinson (Bucks/No. 1)
Juwan Howard (Wizards/No. 5)
Brian Grant (Kings/No. 8)
Jalen Rose (Nuggets/No. 13)
Donyell Marshall (T-Wolves/No. 4)
Wesley Person (Suns/No. 23)
Lamond Murray (Clippers/No. 7)
Charlie Ward (Knicks/No. 26)
Voshon Lenard (Bucks/No. 46)
Dickey Simpkins (Bulls/No. 21)

1995
3 "Stars" and 15 "Players"
Kevin Garnett (T-Wolves/No. 5)
Antonio McDyess (Nuggets#/No. 2)
Damon Stoudamire (Raptors/No. 7)
Michael Finley (Suns/No. 21)
Theo Ratliff (Pistons/No. 18)
Joe Smith (Warriors/No. 1)
Bryant Reeves (Grizzlies/No. 6)
Rasheed Wallace (Wizards/No. 4)
Corliss Williamson (Kings/No. 13)
Jerry Stackhouse (76ers/No. 3)
Gary Trent (Blazers#/No. 11)
Alan Henderson (Hawks/No. 16)
Jason Caffey (Bulls/No. 20)
Eric Williams (Celtics/No. 14)
Greg Ostertag (Jazz/No. 28)
Eric Snow (Sonics#/No. 43)
Cory Alexander (Spurs/No. 29)
Brent Barry (Clippers#/No. 15)

1996
5 "Stars" and 9 "Players"
Allen Iverson (76ers/No. 1)
Kobe Bryant (Lakers#/No. 13)
Shareef Abdur-Rahim (Grizzlies/No. 3)
Stephon Marbury (T-Wolves#/No. 4)
Antoine Walker (Celtics/No. 6)
Zydrunas Ilgauskas (Cavs/No. 20)
Ray Allen (Bucks#/No. 5)
Kerry Kittles (Nets/No. 8)
Othella Harrington (Rockets/No. 30)
Erick Dampier (Pacers/No. 10)
Lorenzen Wright (Clippers/No. 7)
Marcus Camby (Raptors/No. 2)
Vitaly Potapenko (Cavs/No. 12)
Steve Nash (Suns/No. 15)

1997
2 "Stars" and 10 "Players"
Tim Duncan (Spurs/No. 1)
Keith Van Horn (Nets#/No. 2)
Derek Anderson (Cavs/No. 13)
Brevin Knight (Cavs/No. 16)
Chauncey Billups (Celtics/No. 3)
Ron Mercer (Celtics/No. 6)
Maurice Taylor (Clippers/No. 14)
Danny Fortson (Nuggets#/No. 10)
Anthony Johnson (Kings/No. 40)
Alvin Williams (Blazers/No. 48)
Tariq Abdul-Wahad (Kings/No. 11)
Bobby Jackson (Nuggets#/No. 23)

1998
1 "Star" and 7 "Players"
Vince Carter (Raptors#/No. 5)
Michael Olowokandi (Clippers/No. 1)
Mike Bibby (Grizzlies/No. 2)
Paul Pierce (Celtics/No. 10)
Jason Williams (Kings/No. 7)
Raef LaFrentz (Nuggets/No. 3)
Michael Dickerson (Rockets/No. 14)
Cuttino Mobley (Rockets/#41)

Players

RON ARTEST
St. John's small forward
6-6, 233, 19-year-old sophomore

Does he have a position? Other small forwards will be taller and quicker, but Artest's shooting ability (36 percent on college threes) and determination have sold some. "I love everything about him," says Walsh. Private workouts often are the deciding factor for teams. Says the Lakers' Mitch Kupchak: "Going on your last impression is a dangerous habit to get into, but sometimes that's where you get your best feel. We thought Kobe Bryant was incredibly selfish when we saw him play in high school, but when we brought him in, we could tell in 10 minutes he was something special. He gave a better workout than Eddie Jones did as a college senior."

QUENTIN RICHARDSON
DePaul shooting guard
6-6, 215, 19-year-old freshman

Richardson is mature beyond his years. He gets his teammates involved and supplies whatever else the team needs: rebounds, defense, ball movement. At clutch time, though, Richardson always is the one who makes the big play. "He can get up, he's a good leaper, but he also has more strength than your typical shooting guard," says a scout. "He's 215 and he was only a freshman. He's coming back to school, so this is a guy who could go high in next year's draft." Says another scout: "I don't know if shooting guard is his position. He has the size of Mitch Richmond, but I don't know if he can shoot like Mitch."

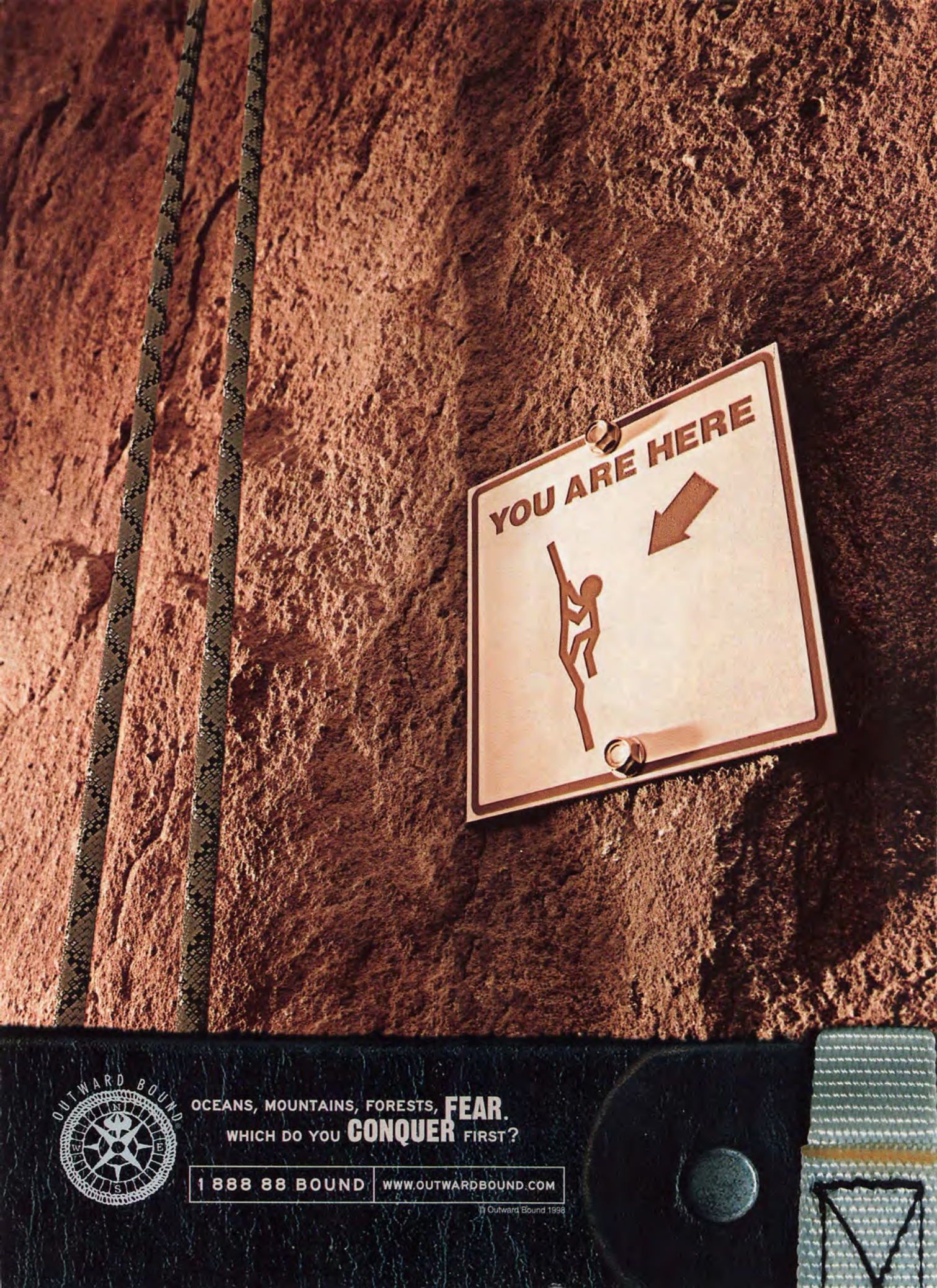
JONATHAN BENDER
Picayune, Mississippi prep small forward
6-11, 200, 18-year-old high school senior

Bender wowed dozens of NBA scouts in attendance at the 1999 McDonald's High School All-American Game in March by scoring 31 points, breaking Michael Jordan's game scoring record with a free throw in the last minute. Says a scout: "He was first-round quality before that game, but we all saw how he could dunk, run the court and block shots with the best kids in the land. He can even knock down three-pointers. He stood out."

JUMAINE JONES
Georgia small forward
6-7, 210, 20-year-old sophomore

Jones developed a post-up game in the off-season to complement his outside touch and his Human Highlight Film II show at Dominique Wilkins' old school. "But when they had the tough game in the Tournament, he didn't show up, and that's when he should have shown up," says one scout. Regardless, most say he's talented and shouldn't be overlooked. Says the Celtics' Chris Wallace: "Most first-round mistakes are made on a 'need' basis, where a team gets focused in on a need situation. There's so little talent available out there that if you pass on it, a mistake can occur."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: EZRA SHAW/ALLSPORT; BRUCE L. SCHWARTZMAN; AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; ROB SIGLER/THE PICAYUNE ITEM



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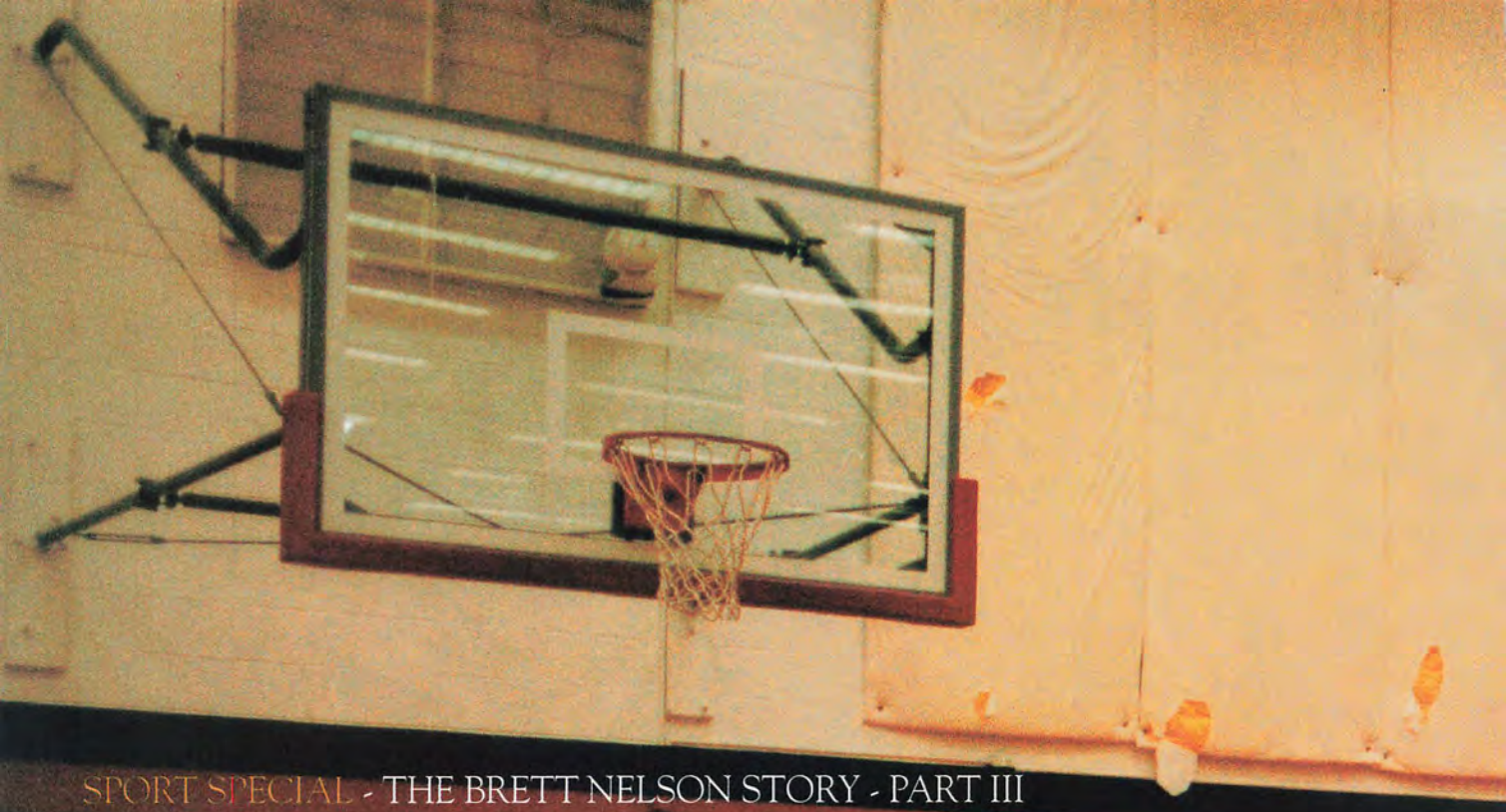


SPORT SPECIAL - THE BRETT NELSON STORY - PART III

The Best Is Yet to Come

Florida-Bound Brett Nelson Ends His Storied High School Career, Leaving His Mark on a Grateful Community

IT ALL BEGINS HERE. IT'S 6:30 P.M. ON A SUNDAY, BUT THE TIME NOR day matters little. It could be 7 a.m. on a school morning, well past midnight during a snowstorm, or even Christmas Day; one never knows when the boy will seek refuge in this place. For Brett Nelson, the tiny St. Albans High gym is ground zero, the earthquake's epicenter, that spot in the pond where a sweet, innocent kid tosses the rock, creating ripples he can clearly see but barely comprehend. And the truth is, in this setting he doesn't have to. The endless adulation, the smiling strangers, the attention that his heart wonders if he truly merits ... none of that touches him here. Like the artist alone with his canvas, Brett Nelson is free to create and perfect in this musty space. And so he starts shimmying along the sharpshooter's sundial, traversing the three-point arc in squeaky, syncopated steps, silent flight, and *swish* after *swish* after *swish* ....

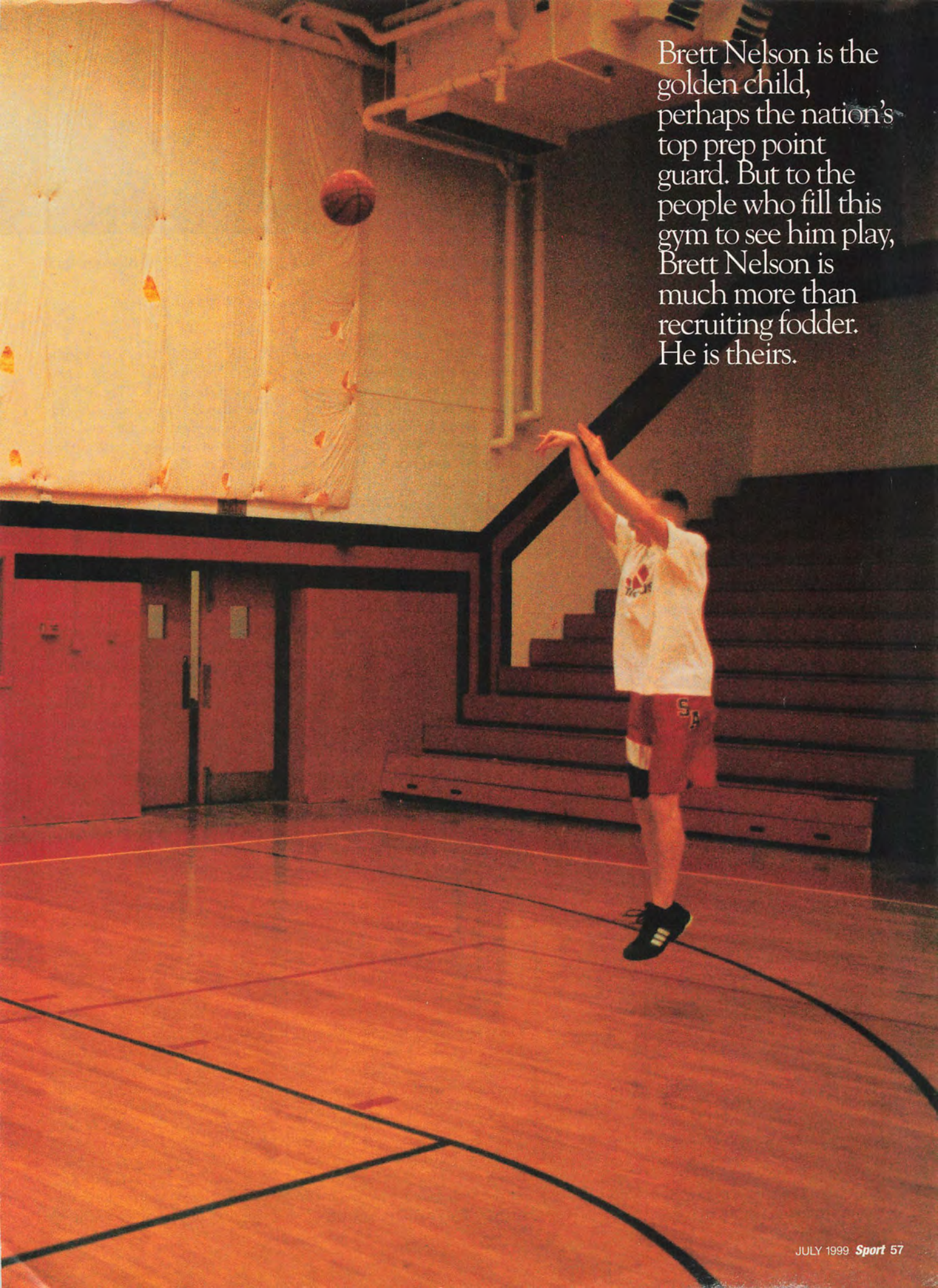
It is a sound to which these walls and its inhabitants have grown accustomed, but like a great song fading out on the radio, this tune will soon be beyond reach. For Brett Nelson is embarking on his swan song, his senior season. To the national bird-dogs who measure such things, Brett Nelson is the golden child, perhaps the nation's top prep point guard. But to the people who fill this gym to see him play, Brett Nelson is much more than recruiting fodder. He is theirs. And whether he understands it or not, he always will be. But how do we answer when he looks us dead in the eye and earnestly wonders why "just because I can dribble and pass and play this game, people want me to come talk to little kids and adults, y'know?"

Yeah, Brett, we know. Hero worship is, well, as you might say, "it's weird." But people need their heroes. Through them we uplift ourselves. Perhaps it's just our nature that if we can't touch God, we want to touch those seemingly touched by God. "Brett's one of the few people I'd come to a gym any time of the day, any time of the night, and watch him perform," says Brett's coach, Tex Williams, who is timing his own legendary career to end with Brett's. "I hate the thought of walking into the gym and not getting that thrill on a daily basis." Perhaps, like Jackson without Jordan, coaching wouldn't be the same without him around.

Fact is, Brett, as you go through this senior season desperately seeking the state championship that's never come St. Albans way, your legend is already assured. In word and deed, you—yup,

Mat Edelson • Photography by Patrick Murphy-Racey

A year ago, SPORT introduced Brett Nelson, a high school point guard from West Virginia who was drawing comparisons to another West Virginian, Jerry West. Captured in the first two parts of his story, Nelson survived a recruiting war (won by Florida), rigorous premier summer camps and AAU competitions, and two high school seasons under the microscope. In this, the third and final part to his story, Nelson winds down a magnificent career with one last shot at a state title, as the uniqueness of his legacy tugs at him and those around him.



Brett Nelson is the golden child, perhaps the nation's top prep point guard. But to the people who fill this gym to see him play, Brett Nelson is much more than recruiting fodder. He is theirs.

skinny, goofy you—have affected the lives of others, allowed a little of your magic to rub off on them. Like George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, you're not even aware of this. Knowing you, you'd hardly believe it anyway.

THE TWO SCRAPBOOKS ARE IN THE Dragons' colors, red and black, the clippings within chronicling a best friend's career:

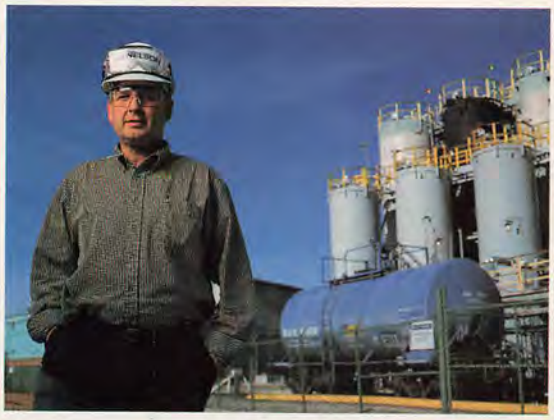
Red Dragons' Nelson State Player of Week .... Nelson's 41 Lifts Dragons Past Eagles .... Nelson Held to 34 Points by South Charleston ....

That last one has Derek Bailey rolling. *"Held!"* he snorts—as if scoring 34 was a gimme. Then again, for his buddy maybe it is. The two met in a third-grade all-star game, a rather early age to be humbled. "He *ah-buuuused* me!" drawls Bailey. "It wasn't any fun." Bailey figured being Nelson's friend might be easier than being his opponent, but he got more than he bargained for. He not only became Brett's closest bud but also his No. 1 fan. Bailey's scrapbooks contain every one of Nelson's newspaper and magazine articles, each one laminated and signed *Brett Nelson, #10*. "He makes me sign everything. *Everything!*" laughs Brett.

Like a guest at a party he can't quite believe he's attending, Bailey has witnessed Brett's career from the inside. In 10th grade, Brett showed him the boxes of recruiting letters deluging the Nelson home. As a junior, when Brett publicly announced he was going to Florida, Derek was on the dais with him.

Now, as a senior, Bailey—in his trademark black wig—is once again leading St. Albans' Dawg Pound, exhorting Nelson to "*Shoot it, Dawg!*" even when Brett's 75 feet away from the basket. Sometimes it seems Nelson's listening. Take the late-January night against Cabell-Midland. Never mind that St. Albans comes in at a mediocre 6-6 ... this is showtime. "Oh, my God," recalls Bailey. "First quarter, 7 of 9 from three-point range. He was winning 23-11 at the end of the first quarter. Had *all* our points. They put a triangle-and-two on Brett, two men on him. He still ended the game with 40 points. Even the Cabell-Midland fans were cheering."

Of such nights memories are made, yet this friendship can't truly be measured on any scoreboard. As odd as it sounds, the two need each other. Derek's friendship is Brett's sanctuary, his time away from the smalltown microscope, when a boy can just be a boy.



Brett's fan club included his dad Jim, No. 1 fan Derek and the St. Albans rowdies.

For both, though, their days together are dwindling. Derek applied to Florida, saying he couldn't wait to stand up in the O-Dome next year, point at Brett and scream out, "*I know him!*" But circumstances may make that more dream than reality. Still, what's in Derek's heart and mind, no distance can tear apart. "We're never gonna forget this. The kids that go to school with him, the people around here," says Bailey. "He's so good and he never says a thing about it. He deserves it all."

THE LETTER CAME NOT ONLY FROM AN AAU coach to a player, but from a father to his son:

Dear Dusty:

A hard effort in the next few years will evolve you into one of the better players in West Virginia. Grab hold of Brett's hip pocket, go through his workouts, and learn as much from him as you can while he's close to us. He can teach and improve you more than I can .... Challenge yourself to be part of the best backcourt duo in the state.

I love you son,

Pops

AS FAR BACK AS HE CAN REMEMBER, Brett Nelson has been Dusty Herscher's benchmark. That "Pops"—Bill Herscher—concurs is doubly impressive, given that Dad may have been the best pure shooter ever to pass through St. Albans' halls.

In Brett, the Herschers found an ideal to emulate, and went to great lengths to make it so. After Herscher and Nelson were AAU teammates under Bill's tutelage, Dusty transferred from Hayes Junior High to McKinley in order to play with Brett. They proved to be kindred spirits. Off court, Herscher, a grade younger than Nelson, saw Brett's commitment to academics: He countered Brett's 3.75 GPA with a 3.8 of his own. On court, Brett saw a fearless, feisty player, while Dusty witnessed an incredible talent who silently taught sacrifice. "He'll just go, go, go through pain. He sprained an ankle real bad. I looked at it. It was blue all around and he's still out there practicing. And I was like, 'Are you all right?' And he's like, 'Yeah, yeah.' His desire to win carries over to everybody."

Never more so than this year. For all the talk of records—Dusty was on the floor as Brett shattered both Hot Rod Hundley's state career scoring mark and the incredible 2,000-point barrier in February—Herscher knew Nelson didn't have what he most coveted: a state championship. Now their last chance as teammates is fast approaching, and the Dragons are stumbling.

An 11-8 mark reflects the team's inconsistency. The team needs a dramatic win against archrival South Charleston in Brett's final home game. Down by 19 early, St. Albans furiously rallies to force overtime. With seconds left and down by one, Dusty watches as Brett, with 39 points, spots Ken-Michael Samms open cross-court. Brett kicks the ball to Mike Kieffer,

who whips it to the green sophomore with four ticks left. Samms, who earlier in the year played so scared that Brett tried screaming the butterflies out of him, will become a player on this night. His three-pointer hits net, the St. Albans fans storm the floor, and in the middle of the mass lay Dusty, Brett and the game's hero. "You did it Ken-Michael! *You did it!*" yells Brett, bear-hugging Samms. "*Never give up!*"

It is the winner's mantra, one Brett Nelson has long since passed on to Dusty Herscher. And one day soon, Dusty intends to let Brett know how much that really means. "I've thought about what I'm gonna say to him after the season," says Herscher. "We've been together so long .... He probably knows I'm thankful, but just to tell him, thank him."

ON THE EVE OF WHAT COULD BE BRETT Nelson's final high school game, Jim Nelson admits loneliness is beginning to permeate his senses. "Brett's room's got a distinct odor about it," says Brett's dad, his wistful look suggesting such smells conjure thoughts of love, not sweat socks. "I know when he was gone last summer, to France, to Germany with all-star teams, you miss him after the first week or so, and you walk by the room and the odor hits you."

As it will again all too soon. Nurturing a prodigy has been an uplifting adventure for both father and son. Giving Brett his wings promises to be difficult on both. "That'll be the toughest thing," says Brett. "We're closer than anything. Peanut butter and jelly. Close as two people can get. I think it will be tougher on him 'cause he won't have anything to do up here. He'll be sitting around."

This entire year for Jim has been a process of simultaneously letting go and holding on. On the basketball side, Dad gave himself the pink slip the day Brett decided to head for Gainesville. His services as coach, gym sweeper, recruiting analyst and press secretary were no longer needed. "My part from here on out is to go and enjoy," he says. Going to games, hanging with the parents of Brett's teammates ... that's all part of the fun for Jim and wife Trudi. But Jim's pride really gets pumped just walking around St. Albans, hearing the buzz Brett creates. As one friend told Jim, "I go places—the hardware store, the barber shop—and no matter where I go, before it's over with, the topic of conversation is Brett. It never fails."

"It's like they're a part of something," theorizes Jim. "They own it from the standpoint that they live here, he lives here, and people feel good about it." Jim gets that feeling every time he strolls through his home. Brett's jersey hanging to dry on a shower rod, the pile of sneakers just outside the garage door .... The boy may move, some of the artifacts disappear, but the memories? Forget the trophy room downstairs—Jim Nelson need only close his eyes to roll the mental videotape. "I'm flashing back to where he was boogieing up and down the court in the fifth and sixth grade all-star tournaments." Even then, they knew he was something.

Memories of the ups and downs of Nelson's senior year are all that remain for his coach, Tex Williams (*upper left*), his teammates and his AAU coach

Bill Herscher (*above*), with sons Dusty (*in St. Albans sweatshirt*) and Gavin.

IT ALL ENDS HERE. OR AT LEAST IT CAN. In their first-round playoff game, St. Albans hosts a Logan team playing the hottest ball in the conference. An 11-2 St. Albans start has the Pound in full throat when Brett suddenly takes a nasty poke to the eye. He stumbles to the bench during a timeout, the eye ballooning like Rocky Balboa's, a thin blood-red half-moon clearly visible on the white of the eye. The injury both blinds and infuriates Brett, who refuses to come out. At halftime, the Dragons' lead is five. "C'mon boys," yells Brett. "Let's get these chumps!"

The boys respond. Jason Rader takes over the boards, Dusty Herscher draws several key charges, and one-eyed Brett pours in 34 as St. Albans wins, 76-66. That sets up a regional final rematch with South Charleston. Only one more win and Nelson & Co. will be back in the state tournament.

Despite a snow storm that closed school, 6,000 make it to the Charleston Civic Center, where St. Albans takes a three-point lead into halftime. But the game, season, Brett's career and any shot at matching Jerry West's state single-season scoring record slip away in the third quarter. South Charleston moves ahead by 10, and St. Albans can't close. With moments left, Tex Williams removes the McDonald's All-American. The entire crowd rises and cheers. Minutes later, in the St. Albans locker, Brett's game face dissolves. He collapses against a white cinder block wall and cries, and cries, and cries, as Jim looks silently on.

It's over. "Great high school career," Jim says gently, as the two make their way back to the floor. Hugs and tears are all around, families and friends realizing that the present has just become the past. Brett Nelson's future has yet to be written, but his place here is forever assured. "I hope I've pleased and given lots of people memories they can tell their kids and grandchildren," says Brett. "'I saw him shooting from half-court. I saw him throw 10 behind-the-back passes in one game.'"

And we saw him capture a town's heart. ■

OVERTIME

If you missed parts I and II of this series, **call 800.800.8326** to order copies of the July 1998 and December 1998 issues.

Pulling No Punches

The NHL's Best Take on Everything From Alcoholism and Racism to Clint Eastwood and ...E.T.? > Edited by Barry M. Bloom

COUNT ON CLAUDE LEMIEUX TO KICK OFF SPORT'S POLL OF NHL PLAYERS JUST RIGHT. WHEN ASKED to name the "softest" player in the league, the Colorado Avalanche forward and three-time Stanley Cup winner didn't miss a beat. "Kris Draper," he said, adding not another word. He didn't have to. Draper is the Detroit Red Wing whom Lemieux crushed into the boards three years ago during the playoffs, smashing his face, breaking both his jaw and nose. Though Lemieux was suspended for the first two games of the Stanley Cup Finals that year, he still holds a grudge. His answer was typical of the ones given by more than 100 players SPORT interviewed. Few held anything back. Oh yeah, that includes guys with a few words for Lemieux.

1. Would you be in favor of a shootout to decide tied regular-season games?

No: 53%
Yes: 38%
Maybe: 4%
Only after an OT period: 3%
Only if losing team gets a point: 2%
(117 responses)

"If that's what they want, why don't we just forget about playing the game. We'll line both teams up at center, we'll have 20 penalty shots, and whoever scores the most wins and we go home. The game is all about playing and hitting and forechecking and backchecking. I don't think that's any way to finish a game. If you don't win in the five-minute overtime then you get a tie. So be it."
– **Adam Graves, N.Y. Rangers left-winger**

So, Adam, what do you *really* think about regular-season OT?

"During the season it would be great for the fans, because we'd be able to put on a show. Sometimes in overtime a team will play for the tie instead of the win and it takes away a lot of the intensity and excitement."
– **Ian Laperriere, Los Angeles center**

2. Where does alcoholism rank in terms of problems facing the league today?

Small problem: 38%
Not a problem: 36%
The league's problem is reflective of society's: 11%
Big problem: 9%
Don't know: 6%
(107 responses)

"There are guys who have a problem. The league has addressed that by setting up a program to help players who have alcohol or drug problems. I think that's a step. I wouldn't say a majority of the players have alcohol problems, but there are more than a handful."
– **Doug Bodger, Los Angeles defenseman**

"I've been on three different teams, and I haven't seen an alcoholic yet."
– **Sylvain Lefebvre, Colorado defenseman**

"I've seen a few lives almost ruined because of it. It exists in the NHL."
– **Denny Lambert, Nashville left-winger**

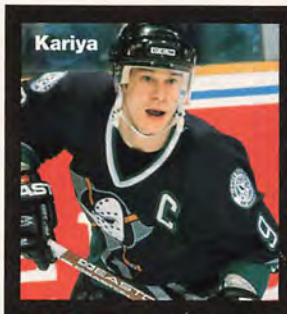
"Alcoholism is a rampant problem in life. It's no worse in the National Hockey League."
– **Brett Hull, Dallas right-winger**

3. Would you be in favor of eliminating the red line for forward passes?

No: 65%
Yes: 29%
Doesn't matter: 6%
(116 responses)

"It'd be exciting for the fans and the goal scorers, but as a defenseman, I like it the way it is. It'd be too wide open, too many goals scored against. I have enough trouble with the red line as it is."
– **Sheldon Souray, New Jersey defenseman**

"As a goalie, I'm biased because that would generate more breakaways in the game, and the least amount of breakaways the other team can have



Who will carry Wayne Gretzky's torch as the NHL's next franchise player?

Paul Kariya: 29%
Jaromir Jagr: 20%
Eric Lindros: 15%
There will never be another like Gretzky: 14%
Peter Forsberg: 4%
Vincent Lecavalier: 3%

Others receiving votes: Sergei Fedorov, Marc Savard, Alexei Yashin, Mike Modano, Niklas Sundstrom *(116 responses)*

FROM TOP: VINCENT LAFORET/ALLSPORT; BOB ROSATO; ROCKY WIDNER

in the game is a good thing."
– Arturs Irbe,
Carolina goalie

4. What's the funniest thing you've ever heard on the ice?

"Once, Ulf Samuelsson said he was hot and shooting the puck well."
– Mike Richter,
N.Y. Rangers goalie

"I heard one guy telling another to put his helmet back on, he was scaring the kids."
– Darcy Tucker,
Tampa Bay center

"One time Eric Lindros told Clark Donatelli to call the cops because somebody stole his legs."
– Ted Donato,
Ottawa left-winger

"When I was a kid, I remember I got into a little fight. I was probably about 10 years old and the referee just picked me up and said, 'Too much TV, kid.' "
– Ray Bourque, Boston defenseman

"One time a ref said to a player who was complaining about off-sides and penalties and stuff, 'You can't coach, you can't ref and you can't play all at the same time, so pick one of them tonight.' "
– Rick Tocchet, Phoenix right-winger

"I've heard players get really, really mad at someone on the ice—yelling at him, wanting to get at him—but using the wrong name. That's never happened to me, because when guys get mad at me, they seem to know my name."
– Claude Lemieux,
Colorado right-winger

5. Who would you most like to have on your team?

Pittsburgh's Jaromir Jagr: 19%
Philadelphia's Eric Lindros: 9%
Anaheim's Paul Kariya: 7%
Colorado's Peter Forsberg: 6%
Buffalo's Dominik Hasek: 5%
N.Y. Rangers' Wayne Gretzky: 4%
22 others received votes
(116 responses)

"Well, I don't want Hasek—he'd take my job."
– Olaf Kolzig,
Washington goalie

"Brian Leetch. He's the hardest-working player I've seen. He works just as hard at practice as he does in games. Never a minute off for that guy."
– Mattias Norstrom,
Los Angeles defenseman

"I've got him on my team. Wayne Gretzky, of course. I idolized him all the way up."
– Marc Savard, N.Y. Rangers center

6. Who would you least like to have on your team?

Pittsburgh's Matthew Barnaby: 5%
Colorado's Claude Lemieux: 3%

Which are the toughest arenas you've played in? *(116 responses)*

Chicago Stadium: 14%
Detroit's Joe Louis Arena: 11%
Philadelphia's First Union Center: 10%
Boston Garden: 9%
New York's Madison Square Garden: 5%
Denver's McNichols Arena: 5%
17 other venues received votes

"Some days, our own."
–Eric Lindros, Philadelphia center

No response: 80%
Would take anyone: 8%
Others receiving votes:
Anaheim's Paul Kariya,
N.Y. Rangers' Jeff Beukeboom,
N.Y. Rangers' Kevin Stevens,
Pittsburgh's Darius Kasparaitis,
Philadelphia's Eric Lindros
and Calgary's Phil Housley
(117 responses)

"The guys you hate playing against are the guys you'd love to have on your team. But I wouldn't want Claude Lemieux under any circumstances."
– Dave Ellett,
Boston defenseman

Eric Lindros *(top)* and Jaromir Jagr *(above)* are their peers' most wanted ... that is, next to Cindy Crawford.

"Barnaby. I don't like the guys who talk the talk but don't walk the walk."
– Enrico Ciccone,
Washington defenseman

"Claude Lemieux. Period."
– Darren McCarty,
Detroit right-winger

7. Who is the league's toughest player?

St. Louis' Tony Twist: 23%
Toronto's Tie Domi: 13%
Philadelphia's Sandy McCarthy: 6%
New Jersey's Krzysztof Oliwa: 5%
Vancouver's Donald Brashear: 5%
Chicago's Bob Probert: 5%
N.Y. Rangers' Darren Langdon: 4%
20 others received votes
(117 responses)

"For fighting, it's got to be Tony Twist. For toughness, the way he plays the game, it's got to be Eric Lindros. I'd go in the other direction quickly, though, if Twist ever came near me."
– Adam Foote,
Colorado defenseman

"I don't know. Everybody is tough compared to me."
– Jaromir Jagr,
Pittsburgh center

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JIM MCISAAC/BBS; BARRY KING/GAMMA LIAISON; STEVE BABINEAU/SPORTS ACTION

Hooray for Hollywood star Michelle Pfeiffer.

8. Is racism a problem in the NHL?
No: 95%
Slight problem: 5%
Yes: 0%
(107 responses)

Which team has the rudest fans?

N.Y. Rangers: 26%
Philadelphia: 13%
Chicago: 12%
Detroit: 7%
San Jose: 4%
Eight others received votes
(117 responses)

"Rangers fans, and they're proud of it, I'm sure."
–Byron Dafoe, Boston goalie

"Well, what's racism? I've been called 'wop' every game. Is that racism? You've got to draw the line somewhere. They're making it a bigger issue than it is. If you call somebody the 'N' word or a wop, I think you should be suspended. But you can't suspend somebody for calling anyone a monkey or giraffe. Get the animal thing out of there."
–Enrico Ciccone,
Washington defenseman

"No. I'm mixed race and no one's ever said anything to me."
–Denny Lambert,
Nashville left-winger

"No, not at all."
–Donald Brashear,
Vancouver left-winger

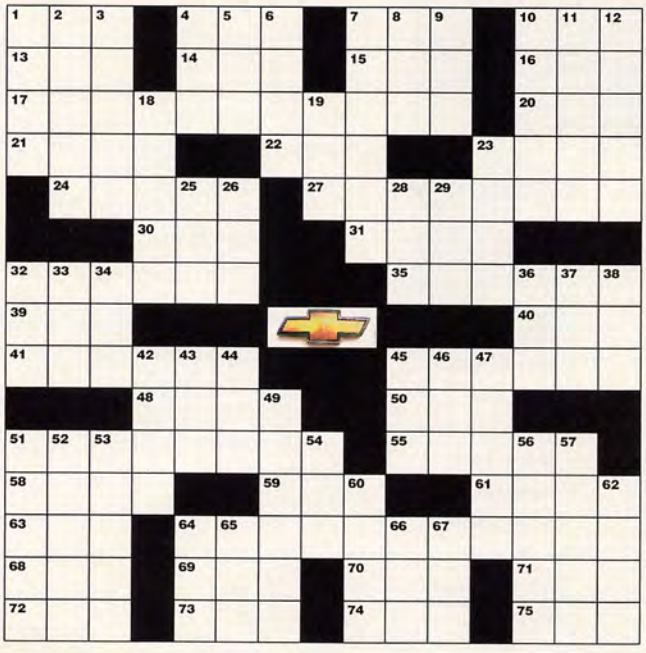
"I haven't heard guys saying anything derogatory on the ice or even away from the rink. There were a few isolated incidents, but for the most part guys know there's a line you don't cross. You don't talk about family or about race in games. It's not right."
–Sean O'Donnell,
Los Angeles defenseman

9. If you could meet any Hollywood star, who would it be and why?
Clint Eastwood: 5%

BARRY KING/GAMMA LIAISON

Chevy Trucks Sport Puzzle

By Stanley Newman



Across

1. Pirate, in headlines
4. With 62 Down, PGA Player of the Year in '89
7. Felipe, to Moises
10. Big Ten Basketball Tournament network
13. Bat wood
14. Be obligated to
15. __ tide (swimming hazard)
16. Weightlifting unit
17. NHL team since '93: 2 wds.
20. Stat-bureau calculation
21. PGA star Ballesteros
22. Either of two AL teams, for short
23. Mata __ (famous spy)
24. Golf's __ Cup
27. NCAA Division I rebound leader in '98
30. Mountain climber's concern: abbr.
31. Jump
32. Shoemaker or Stargell
35. Stolen bases, so to speak
39. Nightclub routine
40. Sneaker width
41. Scored a 64 Down, perhaps
45. Member of Cooperstown's Class of '99
48. Blue Moon of baseball
50. Auto-grille protector
51. France won it in '98: 2 wds.
55. Jai alai basket
58. Goes quickly
59. Former Iowa wrestling coach Gable
61. Lose intentionally
63. School in Champaign: abbr.
64. '92 Wimbledon winner: 2 wds.
68. Wimbledon beverage
69. Ovett rival
70. Cheer for a bullfighter
71. Infant
72. Arch__
73. Muff a fly ball
74. Hoops tourney played at Madison Square Garden
75. Orienteer's direction: abbr.

See page 95 for Chevy Trucks SPORT Puzzle answers.

Down

1. Davey Johnson's autobiography
2. Ballpark employee
3. "THE MOST DEPENDABLE, LONGEST-LASTING TRUCKS"
4. One __ customer: 2 wds.
5. Emulate 37 Down, team-wise
6. Rickey Henderson's current team
7. America East school
8. __ Jordan
9. Pitcher's "best friends": abbr.
10. Beat in a rout
11. Catcher with his own museum
12. Homeland of 21 Across
18. Bicycle part
19. Infield bounce
23. Overblown publicity
25. Yale athlete
26. Highway: abbr.
28. Like 8 Down: abbr.
29. College football cheer
32. Used to be
33. Commit a hockey infraction
34. Piece of fan mail: abbr.
36. Greens __ (golf charge)
37. Mr. Turner
38. Regatta locale, perhaps
42. Tennessee team
43. Baseball Hall of Famer Roush
44. Medich's nickname
45. Network north of the border: abbr.
46. Before, in poems
47. Carbo loader's lunch
49. Horse that runs well on wet tracks
51. Former National League president
52. Former Houston pro
53. Team race
54. 71, at Muirfield
56. One of the senses
57. First member of the 3,000 Hit Club
60. Deion Sanders' nickname
62. See 4 Down
64. Court coup
65. Sonja Henie's homeland: abbr.
66. *When We Were Kings* subject
67. Nail, as a base runner

Which goalie would you least like to face on a penalty shot?

Buffalo's Dominik Hasek: 62%
Colorado's Patrick Roy: 9%
N.Y. Rangers' Mike Richter: 6%
New Jersey's Martin Brodeur: 4%
Nine others received votes
(117 responses)

Jim Carrey: 4%
Jack Nicholson: 4%
Arnold Schwarzenegger: 4%
Tom Hanks: 3%
Kevin Costner: 2%
Mel Gibson: 2%
45 others received votes
(117 responses)

"Clint Eastwood owns a golf course in Carmel. He could get me on there."
– **Ulf Samuelsson, Detroit defenseman**

"Michelle Pfeiffer, and I think the reason is obvious."
– **Craig Ludwig, Dallas defenseman**

"Heather Locklear. I'm a big 'Melrose Place' fan."
– **Andrew Cassels, Calgary center**

OK, we understand Jack, but E.T.?

"Adam Sandler is my tops. He's pretty darned funny."
– **Peter Forsberg, Colorado center**

"Cindy Crawford, to see her legs."
– **Rich Pilon, N.Y. Islanders defenseman**

"E.T."
– **Todd Harvey, N.Y. Rangers center**

10. Should the NHL send players to the Olympics again in 2002?
Yes: 86%
No: 12%
Undecided: 2%
(117 responses)

"They should have waited for this one to begin with because it's in North America and it's on our home turf. The travel will be easier. As great an experience as it was, Nagano wasn't a great place to have an Olympics."
– **Brett Hull, Dallas right-winger**

"Sure, if they don't break any chairs. Just give them padded walls with a mattress and a bathroom, that's it."
– **Enrico Ciccone, Washington defenseman**

"American players gave it a negative outlook. Guys from other countries who were there, especially guys who played on the Canadian team, would jump at the opportunity to go back. Tell the Americans to quit whining and play better."
– **Dave Ellett, Boston defenseman**

"Yeah, then I can have a two-week break."
– **Todd Harvey, N.Y. Rangers center**

Reporting by Jim Armstrong, Barry M. Bloom, Meg Taylor and Sacha Terrell

FROM TOP: ROCKY WIDNER; M. LAMBRAY/SYGMA; EVAN AGOSTINI/GAMMA LIAISON

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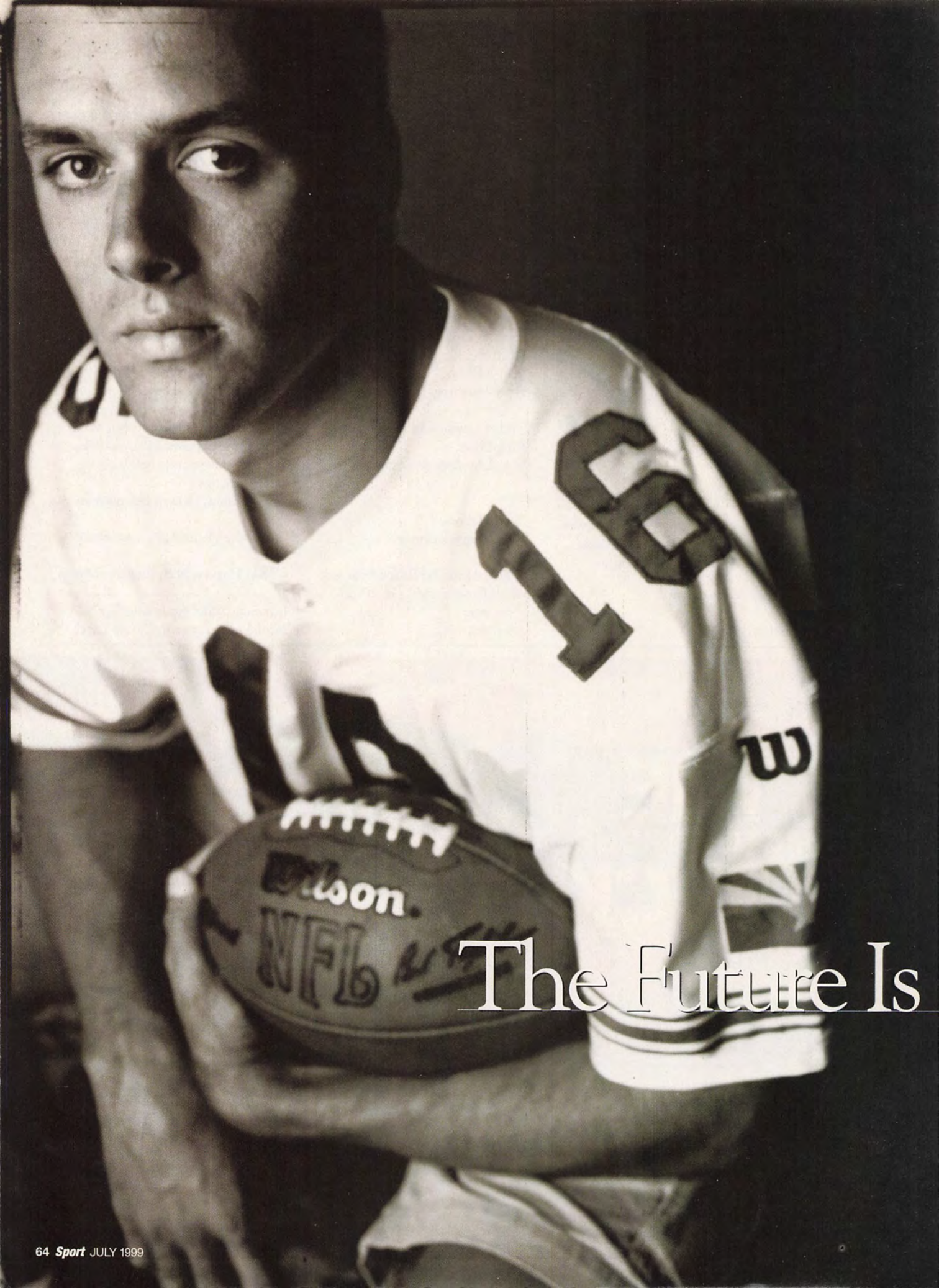
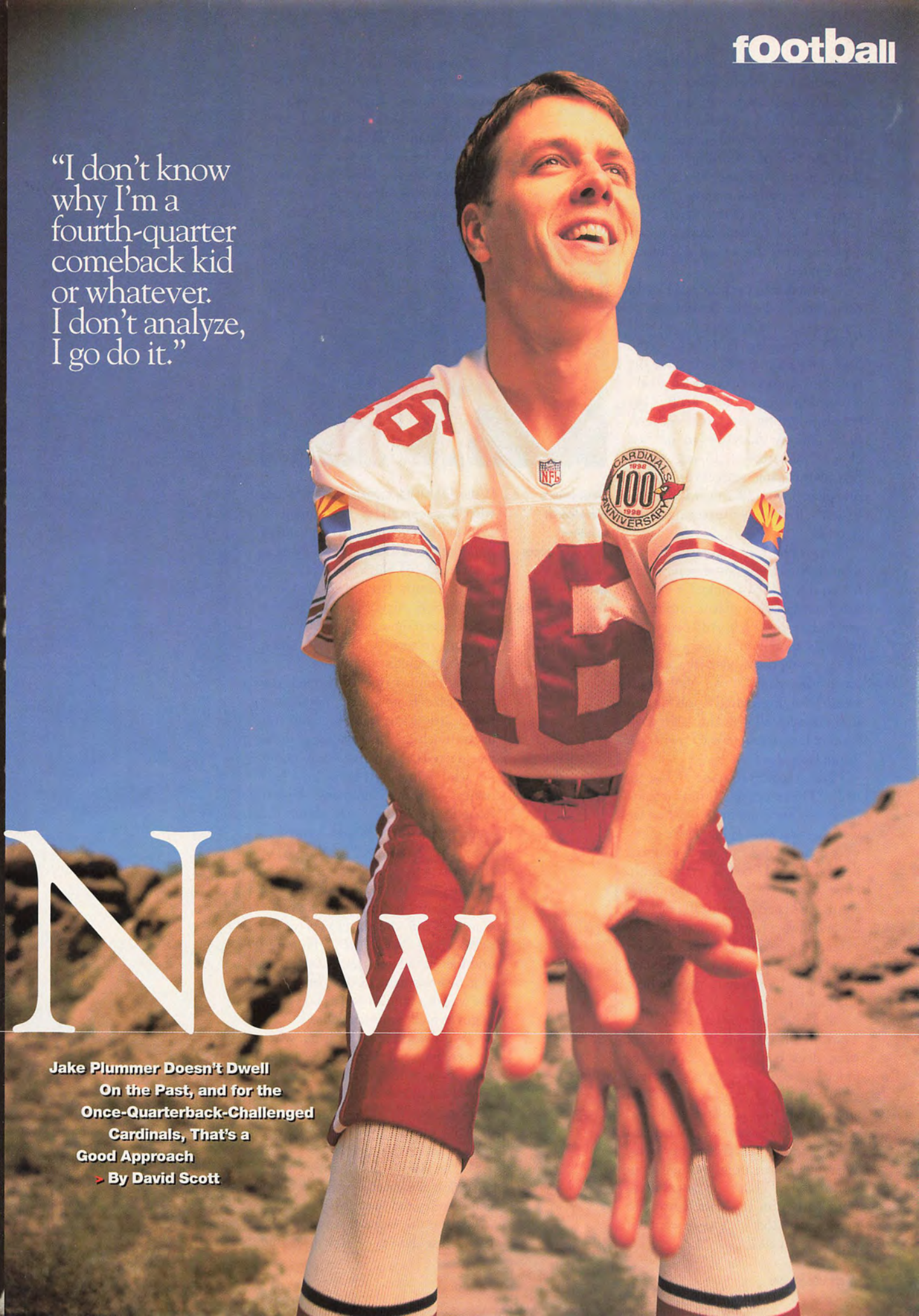


The Future Is



"I don't know why I'm a fourth-quarter comeback kid or whatever. I don't analyze, I go do it."

Now

Jake Plummer Doesn't Dwell On the Past, and for the Once-Quarterback-Challenged Cardinals, That's a Good Approach

> By David Scott

LEFT: DANNY CLINCH; RIGHT: BRUCE RACINE; GROOMING BY MARY REED

THOSE WHO PRECEDED HIM WORE quarterback numbers, lived quarterback lives and took home quarterback money. But the lot of them—the 10 Commoners, if you will—could barely lead the Arizona Cardinals to the desert, never mind the playoffs. Neil Lomax, the pride of mighty Portland State, was the *best* of the bunch. Tom Tupa, who has a tremendous leg, was a punter who threw, not a thrower who punted.

But then, sent by the (Sun) Devils, came Moses to lead his denizens out of the desert and into the promised land of NFL contenders. From Boise to the Man. Jake Plummer doesn't have Big Mo's girth (just 197 pounds) and isn't a towering figure (6-foot-2). But last season, when he guided the century-old Cardinals franchise to its first above-.500 record in 13 seasons, its first playoff game since 1982 and its first playoff win (20-7 over Dallas) in 51 years, it was like the parting of the Red Sea.

Forget the past "saviors." Forget that the franchise's postseason history fits on one side of a dime. Or that its most recognizable player until now was Cuba Gooding Jr. And please, try to forget Commoner Jay Schroeder. He is among those quarterbacks who have walked into the Valley (of Death), leaving scarred Cards faithful in their wake, all wondering if today's Cardinals savior would be tomorrow's Timm Rosenbach.

"I don't look at the past. I refuse to, really," Plummer says. "I think it started at Arizona State in 1996 when we were hosting [No. 1] Nebraska. They were going to dedicate the stadium to [legendary ASU coach] Frank Kush. Now, let me first say, I love Frank Kush. He's been a great influence on me and always has a great word to say to me. But you didn't hear hardly anything about our game. All you heard was about the stadium, the stadium and Frank Kush.

"But you know what? I was like, 'Frank Kush coached 25 years ago, what does he have to do with us today?' I grabbed one of the game programs in front of about half our team and ripped it up and spit on it and said, 'Who gives a damn about this? I don't want to see this. This is us. We're going to go out and make our history today. That's the past. I don't want to live in the past, I want to make a mark today.' And we went out and beat 'em 19-0.

"Same with this past season. Sixteen straight years without the playoffs, 50 years without a victory, Quarterbacks don't stay here. I don't want to listen to all that stuff. I can't stand it," he says, never raising his voice but, like the Moses before him, certainly making his point. Let my people go ... to the playoffs and beyond.

Plummer's heroics in leading Arizona State to the Rose Bowl helped him overcome predraft stereotypes.

WHEN PLUMMER AND HIS CARDS BEGAN what was supposed to be a landmark 1998 football season with consecutive humiliations at Dallas (38-10) and at Seattle (33-14), the Valley of the Sun seemed awfully dark, especially for its favorite Son. Against Seattle, he was sacked seven times and had two interceptions returned for TDs. Hey, *Hogeboom* coulda done better.

As Plummer trudged through the door of his Tempe, Ariz., home after the Seattle game with his chin just about touching the welcome mat, he was greeted by perhaps his only ardent fan who didn't even know how he'd done: Willis, Plummer's bassett hound. "He didn't care about the game or anything, he just wanted to play," says Plummer. "It kind of put things in perspective."

Let's not be so Pollyannaish to think some hound propelled the Cardinals into the playoffs (*What you talkin' 'bout, Willis?*). But Plummer and friends did win three of the next four. Seasons aren't made or broken by the wag of a tail. It takes a good game of gin to really start a revolution.

"We always used to play gin when we were roommates in college, and he came over to my condo and we just busted out a deck of cards and started playing," says Ryan Wood, a fullback at ASU with Plummer. "I could just tell he didn't seem real happy. At ASU, he always had that fire to him regardless of what the outcomes of the games were, and he enjoyed himself a lot during the football season. I told him I just didn't see that fire, that

FROM LEFT: ALLEN KEE/BRSP; MICHAEL ZITO/SPORTSCHROME; MICHAEL PONZINI

Plummer's poise, style and comeback prowess are shades of another not-so-ordinary Joe.

sparkle in his eyes like I did in college. It shouldn't be any different because he's in the NFL. It's the same game."

"He's one of my best friends telling me this, and I kind of realized that, man, I've got to get out of this funk," Plummer says. "It was a pretty strong moment." Strong enough to make Plummer realize the Snake in the grass had become a rake in the mud. "Before last season, every interview I did was all about, 'How does it feel to be the guy who is going to get the [proposed new] stadium or the guy to turn this thing around.' We were 4-12 my first year. I didn't go out and win every single game. All of a sudden I thought I had to do something special that I hadn't done before instead of just doing what I do. And that's what got me."

The Cardiac Cardinals won six of their last nine last year, including their final three in dramatic, come-from-behind Plummer fashion. The upset of the Cowboys in the first round of the playoffs sent Phoenix into a frenzy and, depending on who was counting, also sent somewhere between 8,000 and 3.6 million fans to Sky Harbor Airport to hail the conquerors. The predictable loss at Minnesota the next weekend was almost irrelevant. Moses had led his people to the promised land, a playoff victory. And the Savior had been anointed.

MOSES STUTTERED. THE CARDINALS' Savior, too, has his moments of hesitation. The same guy who sweats confidence and breathes inspiration, the one who already has nine fourth-quarter comeback victories in his first 26 games, has been known to lock himself in his bathroom before a game. With the lights off. For an extended period of time. Ordinarily a plumber in the bathroom is no big deal. But with the lights off? On game day? *Esiason* never pulled a stunt like that.

"I'm just trying to keep my mind on the game and not get uptight about it. Just close my eyes and try to relax," Plummer says. "I don't do it a lot. But sometimes you need to." Hey, when you gotta go, you gotta go.

There were some initial concerns about Arizona's second-round pick, taken 42nd overall in '96 and second among quarterbacks behind first-rounder Jim Druckenmiller.

"The reason Jake fell in the draft was his height, his weight and his

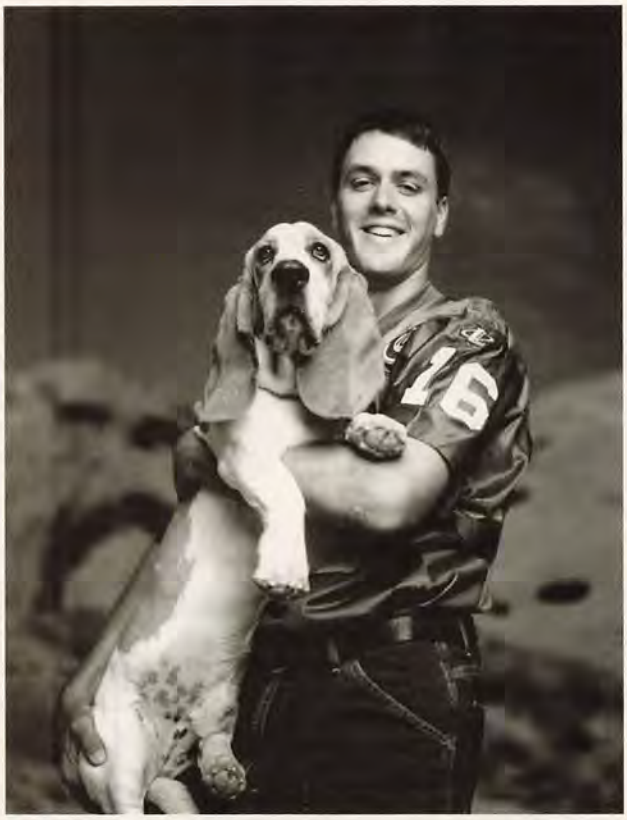
speed, and those types of things you look for in the classic quarterback—or a lot of teams look for in the classic quarterback," says Arizona head coach Vince Tobin. "If they don't have those measurables, then you're reluctant to step to the plate. We had an advantage because of what he had done for the four years he was at ASU and the number of comebacks he had been involved in. We were more aware of what he brought to a program than maybe some other teams were."

But really, Arizona could have brought in O'Donnell—Rosie O'Donnell—and it would have been a marked improvement over Kent Graham. Says Cardinals owner Bill Bidwill, who signed Plummer to a four-year, $29.7 million contract extension last December: "In 1988, Neil Lomax was our quarterback. We were 7-4, leading the NFC East by two games, and he went down to injury. We lost the next five, and it's taken us this long to recover. We just weren't able to find the quarterback that we thought could do the job for us. There aren't any more good quarterbacks than there were 40 or 50 years ago, just more teams. So when you get one, you keep him. He gives us the opportunity to get to the next level. It's very difficult to find a franchise-type quarterback. We went too long without one."

The difference with Plummer is that he knows what it takes to win. "He's like one of those big jets," says Arizona cornerback Aeneas Williams. "Everybody wants to just hop on board and see how high he can take us." His fierce competitiveness with the game on the line transforms Dr. Jake into Mr. Hyde. "I don't know why I'm a fourth-quarter comeback kid or whatever. I don't analyze, I go do it," he says. "I love it. I'm actually scared of it, but I think that might be what it is: the fear of failure. I don't want to go into the locker room knowing that I had the ball in my hands and had a chance to win the game and couldn't get it done."

Plummer has spoken several times with Doug Flutie during the off-season about the pressure and what it creates. "We're alike in a lot of ways—the way we think, the way we play," says Plummer, who used to have a poster of another quarterback, Randall Cunningham, on his bedroom wall. "He's always had to prove something and I've had to prove to myself that I could play."

Before Plummer firmly gripped the world by the bright white laces, he was sacked. Referred to as the "incident" by many around him, Plummer was accused of sexual abuse by several local women, who alleged he had made advances toward them in a local bar after his senior season.



IN FACT

Through Plummer's first 26 games, his 5,840 passing yards rank fourth among current quarterbacks after the same amount of games, behind only Dan Marino (6,743 yards), Drew Bledsoe (6,219) and Vinny Testaverde (5,848). He ranks ahead of such notables as Brett Favre (5,346), Randall Cunningham (5,335), Warren Moon (5,295), Troy Aikman (4,833), John Elway (4,818) and Steve Young (4,319).

The situation was eventually settled out of court, with Plummer agreeing to community service. "It really opened his eyes to the kind of people who are out there," Wood says. "The kind of people who will try to hurt him and get to his money and knock him off his pedestal."

Plummer is uncomfortable discussing it—remember, he's not a big fan of the past—but he will say this: "It happened at an early time in my life when I realized there were people like that, and I learned a lesson." The Kid who became the Man became guarded. Plummer discovered the star athlete's secret: The public revels in creating its heroes, bows to them every Sunday, wears their shirts, eats their cereal and drinks their soda. But in doing all of this, fans unwittingly force their heroes into seclusion and further fray the fabric that used to join players and their fans.

But fans in Phoenix are a strange phenomenon anyway. Finding a native of Phoenix is like finding a seashell in Sedona. Everybody is from somewhere else, bringing along different team allegiances. Before the Cardinals arrived, the area was decidedly Cowboys country. In a place nobody calls home, Plummer is billed as a hometown hero, despite his Boise, Idaho, upbringing. Still, he's been cautious not to let peripheral elements affect his job, saying there will be time for endorsements, appearances and events once he and his team achieve greatness.

"I'm a normal guy who just has talent. I'm no different than a guy who's a great wood carver. The guy can make something special out of a piece of wood, he just might not be carving it in front of 75,000 people."

Nor would he have to follow in the footsteps of former carvers named Steve Beuerlein and Dave Krieg. "Jake's the type of quarterback you look for in that he's had so much success and so much adulation here in Arizona, but it hasn't affected his approach to the game," Tobin says. "He's very level-headed—he works at his craft. I don't think he'll ever get satisfied by money or by accomplishments to where he's not going to try and continue to improve. That to me is the sign of the ones who are going to be great and stay great, the ones who continue to work to get better no matter what success they have."

Tobin says all of this from behind his desk in the same facility where much of *Jerry Maguire* was filmed and thinks about his own Rod Tidwell—the quarterback who has been shown the money and figures to be delivering in the desert for years to come. "There's been an awful lot of one- or two-year wonders in this league, who have come in and tasted success and didn't continue to work and then fell by the wayside," Tobin says.

Holy Moses, ain't that the Cards' honest truth. ■

OVERTIME

For more on Plummer and the Cardinals, check out the team's Web site at **www.azcardinals.com** or the NFL's site at **www.nfl.com/cardinals**.

BRUCE RACINE

Going Up

Jake Plummer's Not the Only Young Star Primed for His First Pro Bowl. Here Are Three Others

BRUCE L. SCHWARTZMAN

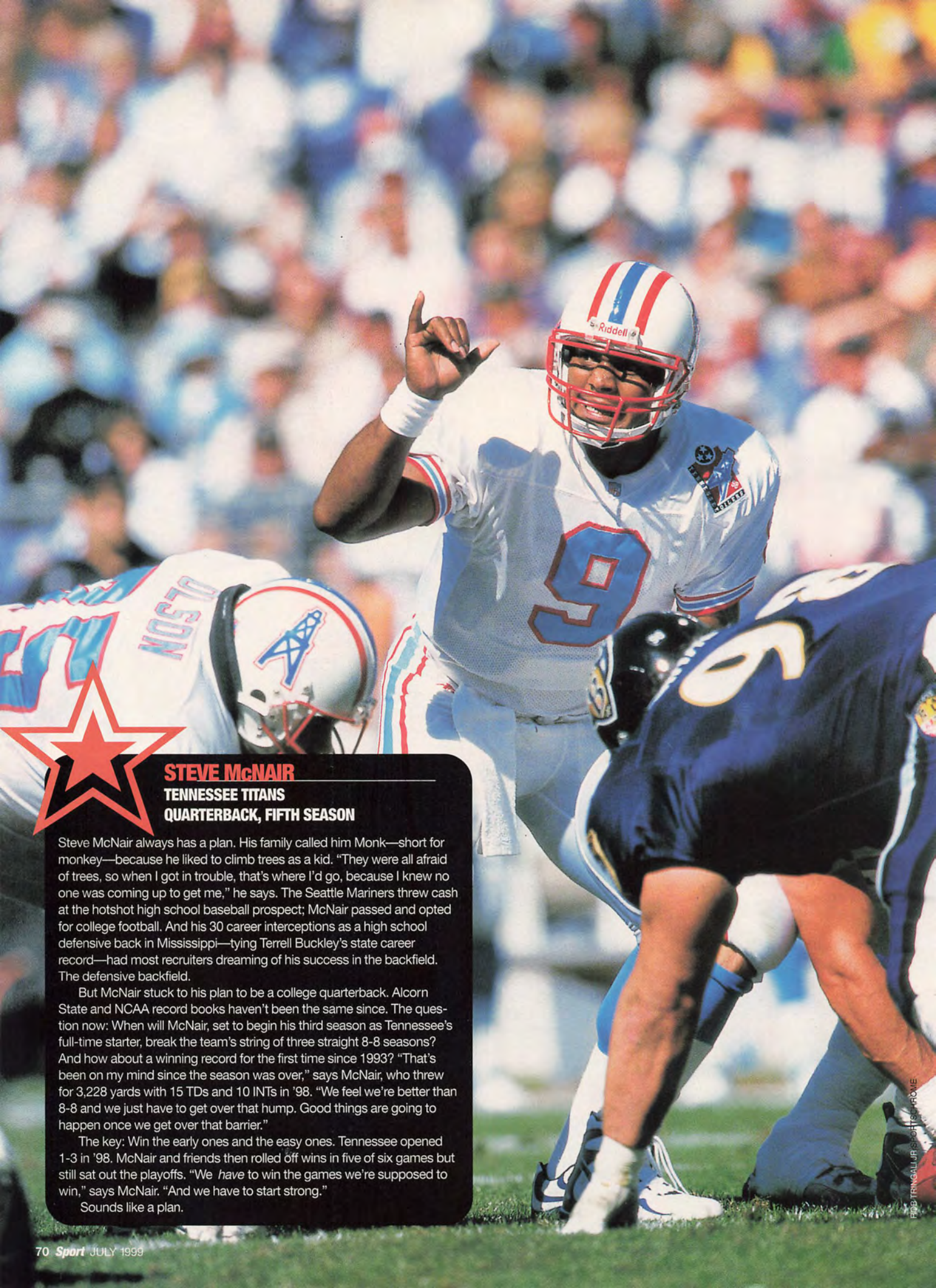
TERRELL OWENS

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS
WIDE RECEIVER, FOURTH SEASON

Terrell Owens thought he was going to be the goat. Sure, he'd made big plays all year. Yeah, he led the 49ers—Jerry Rice's 49ers—with 14 touchdown catches and 1,097 receiving yards. But drop four passes and fumble once in a playoff game and you'll be called many things. The team's franchise player isn't usually one of them. But there was Owens, knifing through the Green Bay Packers' secondary and catching Steve Young's game-winning TD pass with three seconds left in last year's 30-27 wild-card win. Owens' "redemption catch" gave Young his first win over the Pack in nine games and ended the 49ers' five-game losing streak to Green Bay.

Owens is used to slipping through the cracks. Barely wanted out of high school, the unknown from Tennessee-Chattanooga was the 11th receiver picked in the '96 draft. Now he's the heir to Rice, whom Owens idolized and honored in college by wearing Rice's No. 80. Owens has celebrated most of his 27 career TDs with a dance. The redemption catch, however, was celebrated only with tears of joy. "When I was a kid," Owens says, "I'd watch pro football on TV and I'd see someone make a play and I'd say, 'I wish that could be me.' But then I'd have to wonder, 'Could I make that big play?' "

No one wonders anymore.



STEVE McNAIR

TENNESSEE TITANS
QUARTERBACK, FIFTH SEASON

Steve McNair always has a plan. His family called him Monk—short for monkey—because he liked to climb trees as a kid. "They were all afraid of trees, so when I got in trouble, that's where I'd go, because I knew no one was coming up to get me," he says. The Seattle Mariners threw cash at the hotshot high school baseball prospect; McNair passed and opted for college football. And his 30 career interceptions as a high school defensive back in Mississippi—tying Terrell Buckley's state career record—had most recruiters dreaming of his success in the backfield. The defensive backfield.

But McNair stuck to his plan to be a college quarterback. Alcorn State and NCAA record books haven't been the same since. The question now: When will McNair, set to begin his third season as Tennessee's full-time starter, break the team's string of three straight 8-8 seasons? And how about a winning record for the first time since 1993? "That's been on my mind since the season was over," says McNair, who threw for 3,228 yards with 15 TDs and 10 INTs in '98. "We feel we're better than 8-8 and we just have to get over that hump. Good things are going to happen once we get over that barrier."

The key: Win the early ones and the easy ones. Tennessee opened 1-3 in '98. McNair and friends then rolled off wins in five of six games but still sat out the playoffs. "We *have* to win the games we're supposed to win," says McNair. "And we have to start strong."

Sounds like a plan.

ROB TRINGALI JR. SPORTSCHROME

VINCENT MANNIELLO/SPORTSCHROME

VONNIE HOLLIDAY

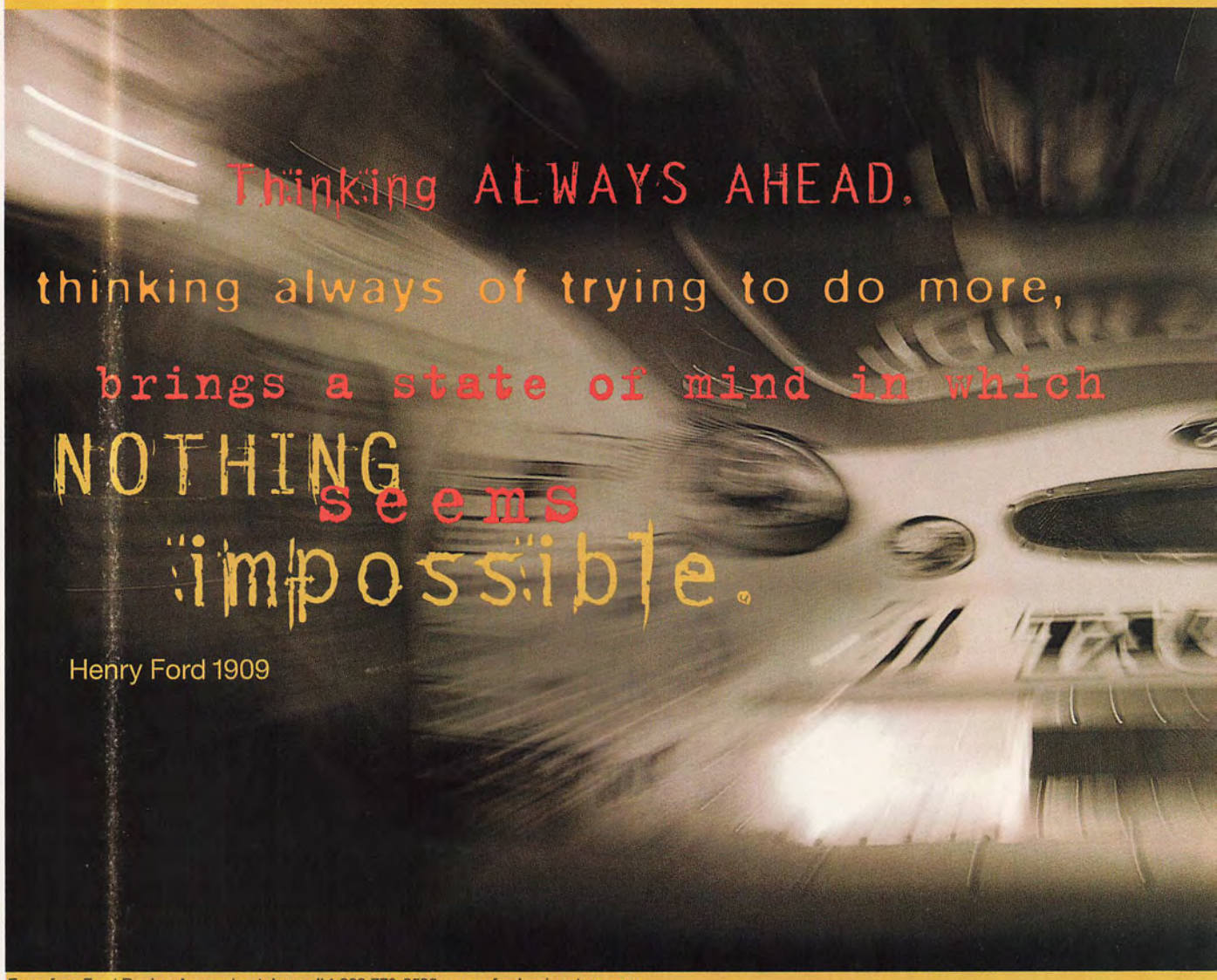
GREEN BAY PACKERS
DEFENSIVE END, SECOND SEASON

Vonnie Holliday answers to Chocolate Thunder. And Superman. He picked up a few other nicknames between high school stardom in Camden, S.C., and his smashing rookie season in Green Bay. But Holliday simply calls himself lucky. No wonder: Last season he joined the NFL's premier defensive line, featuring Gilbert Brown, Santana Dotson and future Hall of Famer Reggie White. "I don't yet fully understand what that did for my career," Holliday says of playing with White. "He's going to go down as the best defensive end to play the game. To get to know him and play with him is just unbelievable."

The 6-foot-5, 300-pound Holliday took after Reggie from the start. He needed just nine games to collect more tackles, tackles for loss and sacks than predecessor Gabe Wilkins had in 19 games in '97. Overall, Holliday tied a team rookie record with eight sacks and had two fumble recoveries. He missed four of the final five games—and a shot at NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year—with a sprained ankle.

After the season, Holliday rode his success right back to where he began. He and Camden natives Bobby Engram of the Bears and Tyronne Drakeford of the Saints plan to launch a youth summer basketball league in their hometown. "We want to give something back," he says, "and we thought that's a great place to start."

Holliday knows all about great starts.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Henry Ford 1909

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Full Speed Ahead

Tired of Second-Best, Mark Martin Is in a Hurry to Take Home His First Winston Cup Championship

MARK MARTIN GLANCES REPEATEDLY AT HIS WRIST WATCH, HIS BODY language screaming, "Let me out of here!" It's just after lunchtime during race week in Texas, and qualifying runs for the weekend's race begin in just over an hour. Sporting a buzz cut and clad in a racing suit that sucks up against his slight build like a Rebecca Romijn-Stamos bodysuit, the 5-foot-6 driver of the No. 6 Valvoline Ford Taurus can't wait to ditch these reporters and get back to driving.

Time away from crew chief Jimmy Fennig means less time to chase after the quest that has eluded him since he joined NASCAR's big leagues in 1981: the Winston Cup championship. If it seems he's in a hurry, he is. At age 40, the Batesville, Ark., native and father of five knows the other guys are working just as hard to stay a step ahead, and after posting a career year in '98, Martin has no time for pleasantries.

Fact is, Mark Martin's too good a driver not to have a Winston Cup title mounted on his hood yet. He's one of the few men on the circuit capable of keeping Jeff Gordon from winning every year. Martin's success in IROC competition against NASCAR, Formula One and Indy car champions "indicates that he is the best of the best in terms of modern-day drivers," according to owner Jack Roush, whose team Martin joined in 1988. "He is the driver of this decade and hopefully of the next one."

Last year, Martin enjoyed a domination in the form of seven Winston Cup checkered flags, 22 top-five finishes and race earnings of $4.3 million. But it was Gordon, the Golden Child, who clutched the points title with a Richard Petty-like 13 wins in a season largely void of serious mishap.

"A lot of people ask me if this is the year, and I give them the answer they're not looking for, which is, 'I don't know,' " says Martin, in his Ross Perot-like twang. Martin's three second-place Winston Cup championship finishes are second only to four-timer Bobby Allison. "The points title might be the hardest thing in sports to win. It could also be the easiest, if everything hits right."

Martin does not mention Gordon by name, but when he speaks of "things hitting right," he sums up his rival's 1998 season. In seven of Gordon's 13 wins, he languished in fifth place or lower only to sweep into the lead after the final round of pit stops. Martin, in the meantime, endured a gear failure at Daytona, a pit-entry bang-up at Martinsville and a dropped cylinder at Darlington in September that spiked his championship hopes for good. But as painful as it was to lose to Gordon, it was nothing compared to the pain Martin felt when his father, stepmother and 11-year-old half-sister died from a private plane crash last August. Through it all, Martin has been able to focus on the prize, the Winston Cup championship.

"Mark Martin is one of my heroes," Gordon told *The Dallas Morning News* after clinching the title last November. "I congratulate him on a great year and say thanks for what a great season he's made this for me."

The Gordon-Martin rivalry for the '99 points championship presents vivid contrasts. Gordon, at close range, looks even more boyish than his 27 years. With a face as weather-beaten as a wood-shingled roof on an Arkansas barn, Martin looks older than 40. Because Gordon bypassed a full apprenticeship at the dirt track minor leagues, in the minds of the stock car traditionalists his act still goes over like Frankie Avalon at a Tennessee turkey shoot. Martin devoted his adult life to running jalopies at the chicken-fried fairgrounds circuit and endured long years of tedium and struggle to survive in NASCAR with underfinanced race cars. That ended when Roush hired Martin, jump-starting Martin's career.

"I changed my diet completely and went on a full-phase strength training program like that of professional athletes in other sports," says Martin, who swears by a race diet of tuna, wheat bread, water and pretzels. "The fact is that before I joined Roush Racing, I didn't have time for strength training. I was working 16 hours a day, seven days a week."

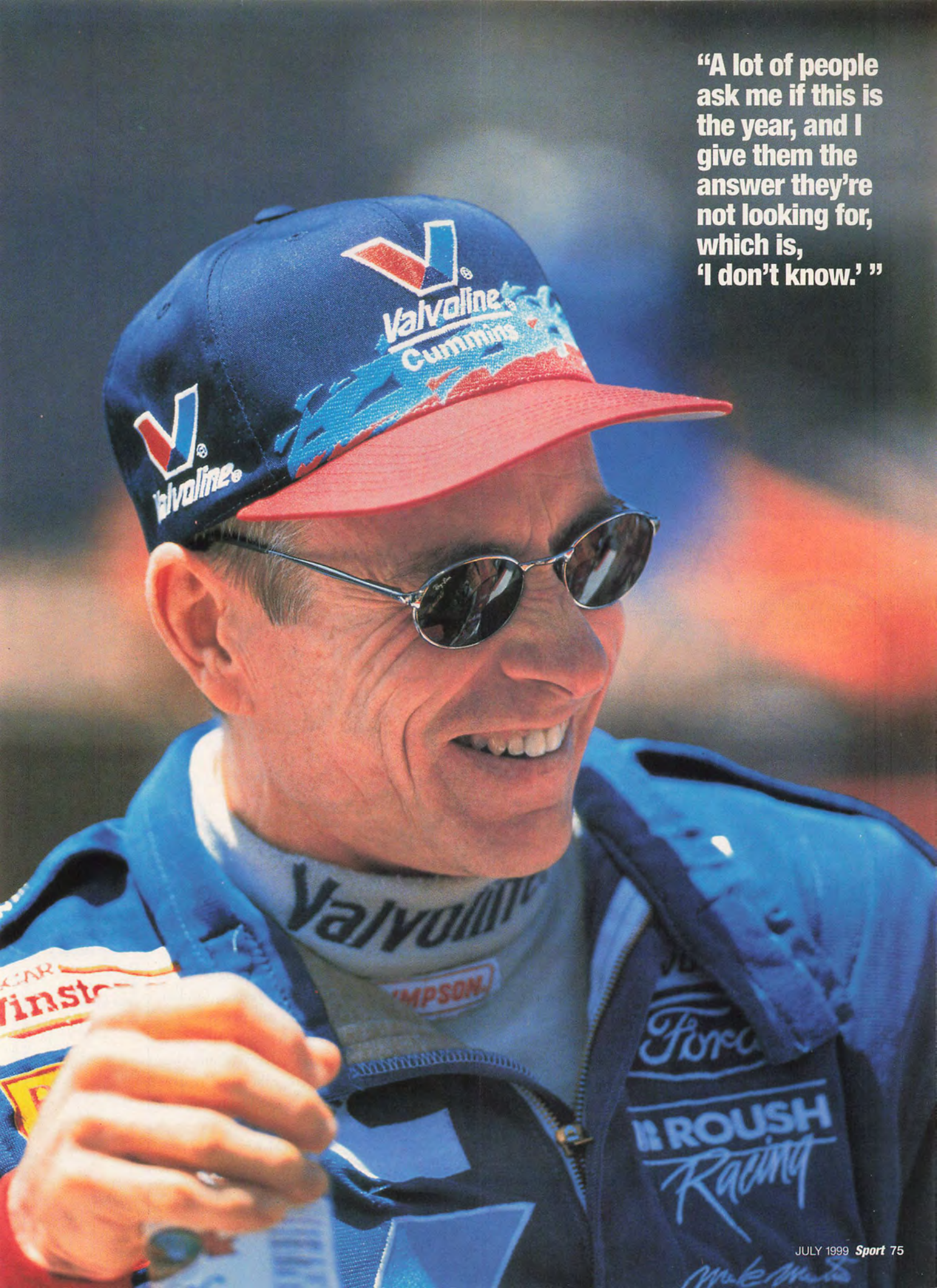
Roush, with his master's degree in scientific mathematics and owner of five Winston Cup entries (Martin, Jeff Burton, Chad Little, Kevin Lepage and Johnny Benson), loves Martin's blue-collar approach. "When I encountered Mark, he was hanging on by his fingernails just to stay in a ride in Winston Cup," says Roush, 57. "Mark was a hardware guy who was much more interested in how many cars we were going to build, what they were going to be like, how many times we would test the cars and who was going to work on them than he was in how much money he was going to make. I talked to three or four other Winston Cup drivers and they initiated no discussion on a topic other than money."

For Martin, all the talk is of winning a championship, and he's determined to get it. Says veteran driver Bobby Hamilton: "There's a song, 'I'm a lover, not a fighter.' Now, that's Jeff Gordon. But I wouldn't want to run across Mark Martin in a dark alley if he was mad, even if he is a little bitty fellow." ■

BY MIKE SHROPSHIRE • PHOTO BY ALLEN KEE/BRSP

FACT Entering this season, Martin had the most career victories (34) in the NASCAR Busch Grand National Series.

INSET: BRIAN SPURLOCK


"A lot of people ask me if this is the year, and I give them the answer they're not looking for, which is, 'I don't know.' "
Valvoline
Cummins
Valvoline
ROUSH
Racing

Sport
BEST OF THE CENTURY
1900~1999
Magazine

A CENTURY OF OLYMPICS

EDITED BY JONATHAN TESSER

THE FIRST U.S. OLYMPIC TEAM MADE ITS WAY TO ATHENS IN 1896 ON A TRAMP STEAMER. LED BY ROBERT GARRETT, A GROUP of Ivy Leaguers and club athletes from Boston entered 12 events and won nine of them. It was a long way from those first modern Games to today's commercial carnival, yet when the Olympics begin and the focus is on the competitors, the essence remains—men and women who have trained for years, looking toward what is, for most, a once-in-a-lifetime chance to be the very best in the world. For every IOC scandal, there is a Dan Jansen skating in memory of his sister, or a Rafer Johnson, who spent part of his childhood living in a railroad car, winning the decathlon. For every multimillionaire on the pro basketball Dream Team, there is an Al Oerter, who came out of athletic retirement every four years to win the discus gold medal four straight times—during time off from his regular job.

When I think back on the 11 Olympics I've covered, I most often think of the underdogs. In the first Winter Games I worked on, at Innsbruck in 1964, there was Terry McDermott, a barber from Bay City, Mich., winning the only U.S. gold medal. In the 500-meter speed-skating event, which had been conceded in advance to Soviet star Yevgeny Grishin, McDermott skated at a late-morning starting time through the slushy, melting surface of the outdoor rink to win.

Of course, you can't forget the marvelous feats of those who have established standards to which later athletes could aspire—Jim Thorpe and Paavo Nurmi, Carl Lewis and Babe Didrikson, Johnny Weissmuller and Esther Williams, Greg Louganis and Nadia Comaneci. From whatever corner of the world they may come, whatever language they speak or sport in which they participate, all represent the Olympic ideal of the Games' founder, Baron Pierre de Coubertin: *simply to compete*. As will the athletes yet to come, the champions still to be born.

–Jim McKay, ABC Sports

To celebrate the turn of the century, SPORT is profiling the most important athletes and moments in the major sports in each issue of 1999, culminating in our special End of the Century issue in December. We've enlisted a panel of experts to help us select the top 10 athletes and moments of the century for each sport. Next month: tennis.

Despite this mishap in '88 (*top left*), Louganis headed off the competition to cap a dominant diving career; Lewis (*above*) won the long jump in four straight Games and took home nine golds in all.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: CORBIS/AFP; MIKE POWELL/ALLSPORT; CORBIS/BETTMANN-UPI; TONY DUFFY/ALLSPORT; CORBIS/BETTMANN-UPI; ALLSPORT/HULTON/DEUTSCH (2); ALLSPORT; UPI-CORBIS-BETTMANN

TOP 10 SUMMER GAMES MOMENTS

1. ISRAELI OLYMPIANS DIE IN PALESTINIAN TERRORIST RAID (1972)
In the early morning hours of Sept. 5, armed Palestinian terrorists slip into the Olympic Village in Munich. The terrorists kill two Israelis, hold nine others hostage and demand the release of 200 Arabs being held in Israeli prisons. After lengthy negotiations, the terrorists agree to leave with their hostages and fly to an Arab country. When the helicopters carrying the terrorists and hostages land at a military airport, an attempt by the German police to free the hostages ends in tragedy, as all nine Israeli Olympians are killed.

2. SEVEN 10s FOR NADIA (1976)
At age 14, Nadia Comaneci stuns the gymnastics world at the Montreal Games and receives the first perfect scores ever awarded in the Olympics. The scoreboards, incapable of registering the unprecedented 10, flash "1.0."

3. OWENS FOILS HITLER'S GAMES (1936)
From a purely athletic standpoint, Jesse Owens' performance at the Berlin Games is remarkable. He enters four events—the 100 and 200 meters, the long jump, and the 4-x-100 relay, which he anchors—and wins all four. But Owens' achievements under the circumstances—in Nazi Germany and aware of the Nazis' propaganda portraying blacks as inferior—truly show his strength and spirit.

4. EXPLODING THE ENVELOPE (1968)
Bob Beamon's long jump of 29 feet, 2½ inches in Mexico City goes beyond what's considered the realm of possibility. In the 32 years since Jesse Owens had jumped 26 feet, 5½ inches, the world record had progressed 8½ inches. In one leap, Beamon adds another 21¼ inches to that.

5. THE GOLDEN BOY ROLLS A SEVEN (1972)
After he predicted he'd win six gold medals (but came through with two relay golds, no individuals) in 1968, Mark Spitz achieves redemption in dominating fashion. He wins seven golds in seven events (including relays) in Munich.

6. ZÁTOPEK HITS THE DISTANCE TRIFECTA (1952)
Czech Emil Zátopek wins both the 5,000 and 10,000 meters at Helsinki. Then he decides to compete in his first marathon and wins his third gold medal, completing a hat trick that has never been equaled.

7. TEAM USA LOSES ITS FIRST OLYMPIC BASKETBALL GAME (1972)
In a gold-medal game featuring three attempts to play the final three seconds, the Soviet Union beats the United States, 51-50, creating one of the greatest controversies in the history of international sports.

Clockwise from top left: Summer Games greats Al Oerter, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, Jim Thorpe, Mark Spitz, Jesse Owens, Nadia Comaneci and Babe Didrikson.

8. LEWIS MATCHES OWENS (1984)
Carl Lewis is overpowering in Los Angeles in his attempt to match Jesse Owens' four-gold-medal performance. He wins the long jump by just under a foot, then takes both the 100 and 200 meters before anchoring the U.S. 4-x-100 relay team to gold in world-record time.

9. JUICED JOHNSON FORFEITS GOLD (1988)
Canadian Ben Johnson is forced to give up his 100-meter gold medal from the Seoul Games after traces of steroids are discovered in his urine.

10. THE BLACK POWER SALUTE (1968)
As the anthem plays at the victory ceremony for the 200 meters, sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who were part of a movement that called for black athletes to boycott the Mexico City Games, bow their heads and raise a black-gloved fist.

TOP 10 SUMMER GAMES ATHLETES

1. JESSE OWENS, USA, TRACK AND FIELD
A year after breaking five world records and tying a sixth—in just 45

minutes—at the Big Ten championships, Owens won four gold medals at the 1936 Summer Games in Berlin.

2. CARL LEWIS, USA, TRACK AND FIELD
Lewis won 10 Olympic medals (nine gold) over the course of four Games (1984-96). He won the long jump in four consecutive Olympics, and in 1984 he equaled Owens' quadruple-gold performance.

3. MARK SPITZ, USA, SWIMMING
In the 1972 Munich Games, Spitz won every race he entered, coming away with seven gold medals, still the record for an athlete in a single Games. Overall, he won 11 medals (nine gold) in two Olympics (1968 and '72).

4. NADIA COMANECI, ROMANIA, GYMNASTICS
Comaneci was the women's all-around gold medalist in Montreal in 1976. She also won the balance beam twice (1976 and '80) and totaled nine career medals (five gold).

Jean-Claude Killy (*above*) skis to a gold medal triple in '68; Bonnie Blair (*below*) has won more medals than any U.S. Winter athlete.

THE PANEL

SPORT would like to thank the following people for helping us select the top Olympic athletes and moments of the century: Jim McKay, ABC Sports; Bud Greenspan, documentary filmmaker; Dick Ebersol, chairman, NBC Sports; Anita DeFrantz, vice president, International Olympic Committee; Al Trautwig, MSG Network.

5. JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE, USA, TRACK AND FIELD
She took silver in the heptathlon in 1984 before winning the event in '88 (a world record) and '92. Joyner-Kersee also won the long jump in '88 and took bronze in both '92 and '96.

6. MILDRED "BABE" DIDRIKSON, USA, TRACK AND FIELD
Didrikson won gold in the 80-meter hurdles and the javelin at the 1932 Los Angeles Games. She tied for first in the high jump, but was given the silver medal when the judges ruled her jumping style caused her head to clear the bar before her body. This style soon was legalized.

7. PAAVO NURMI, FINLAND, TRACK AND FIELD
At the 1924 Paris Games, the "Flying Finn" won the 5,000 meters less than an hour after winning the 1,500. His 12 career medals (nine gold) are the most by a track and field athlete.

8. JIM THORPE, USA, TRACK AND FIELD
After Thorpe won both the decathlon and the pentathlon at the 1912 Stockholm Games, King Gustav V of Sweden told him at the awards ceremony, "Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world." Thorpe's reply: "Thanks, King."

9. GREG LOUGANIS, USA, DIVING
Louganis won a platform silver in '76 in Montreal and won golds in both springboard and platform in '84 and '88. He survived a botched dive in the springboard preliminary round in '88—he smacked his head on the diving board when he failed to leap out far enough—and won the event the next day with five stitches in his head.

10. AL OERTER, USA, TRACK AND FIELD
In 1968, Oerter became the first track and field athlete to win four gold medals in four consecutive Olympics. He also set Olympic records with all four of his winning throws in the discus.

TOP 10 WINTER GAMES MOMENTS

1. MIRACLE ON ICE (1980)
In one of the most dramatic athletic confrontations of the Cold War, the Americans stun the world favorite Soviet Union, 4-3, after rallying from a 3-2 deficit. The U.S. goes on to defeat Finland, 4-2, to take the gold medal in Lake Placid.

2. HEIDEN GOES THE DISTANCES (1980)
Speed skater Eric Heiden wins all five races he enters at distances ranging from 500 to 10,000 meters. He sets a world record in the most grueling event, the 10,000, and Olympic records in the other four.

3. HOME-TEAM HERO HURTLES TO DOWNHILL GOLD (1976)
Austrian Franz Klammer takes over the Winter Games in Innsbruck. Skiing last in the first group of 15, Klammer trails after the first two splits, but he blitzes the final 500 meters to win the gold.

4. VETERAN 15-YEAR-OLD WINS FIGURE SKATING GOLD (1928)
Competing in her second Games, Norway's Sonja Henie wins figure skating gold in just the second Winter Olympics ever held.

5. BRITISH DUO'S BOLERO IS PERFECT (1984)
Integrating their movements perfectly to the music of Ravel's "Bolero," Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean are awarded 12 perfect marks as they skate to a gold medal at the Sarajevo Games.

6. JANSEN FINALLY GETS HIS GOLD (1994)
After missed opportunities in 1988 and '92, Dan Jansen knows Lillehammer is his last shot at gold. He slips in his specialty, the 500, and finishes eighth, but rebounds to skate to a world record in the 1,000 in the last Olympic race of his career.

7. OVER THE RAINBOW (1976)
Dorothy Hamill's friends in the Innsbruck crowd use a tongue-in-cheek sign ("Dorothy, Wicked Witch of the West") to relax the young sensation, who skates the performance of her life to take the gold.

8. TONYA AND NANCY (1994)
Ice skater Nancy Kerrigan is clubbed on her knee at the Olympic figure skating trials, and the ex-husband of Tonya Harding, Kerrigan's chief competitor for a spot on the American team, is charged along with three other men in the attack. Kerrigan wins silver at Lillehammer; Harding is allowed to skate as well, but is later banned for life from the sport.

9. WITT WINS THE "BATTLE OF THE CARMENS" (1988)
Both defending figure skating gold-

FROM TOP: UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN; SIMON BRUTY/ALLSPORT

medalist Katarina Witt and American champion Debi Thomas skate to selections from Bizet's opera. Thomas falters, while Witt's nearly flawless performance earns the East German a second consecutive gold medal.

10. DÄHLIE STANDS ABOVE THE REST (1998)
Having already cross-country skied in three events, Norway's Bjørn Dählie collapses in the snow at the 50-kilometer finish line, a winner by 8.1 seconds.

TOP 10 WINTER GAMES ATHLETES

1. ERIC HEIDEN, USA, SPEED SKATING
In 1980 at Lake Placid, Heiden had the most dominating Winter Olympics ever: five events entered, five gold medals.

2. JEAN-CLAUDE KILLY, FRANCE, ALPINE SKIING
Killy's gold medal triple (slalom, giant slalom, downhill) at the 1968 Grenoble Games almost didn't happen. Austrian Karl Schranz fell after a mysterious man inadvertently skied too close to the course. Schranz was given another run, and his time put him in first place. A French protest of Schranz's first run was upheld, however—he had missed two gates before the stranger's interference—and Killy had his third gold.

3. BJØRN DÄHLIE, NORWAY, CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING
Dählie dominates in performances over three Olympics (1992, '94, '98). His eight gold and 12 overall medals are Winter Olympics records.

4. SONJA HENIE, NORWAY, FIGURE SKATING
Henie, age 15 at the '28 Games, was the youngest-ever Winter gold medalist until her 70-year record was broken by Tara Lipinski in Nagano. Henie, the first to combine skating with dance choreography, repeated in '32 and '36.

5. KATARINA WITT, EAST GERMANY, FIGURE SKATING
Using solid technical skills and a sensuous appeal, Witt takes the prim and proper figure skating world by storm on the way to consecutive gold medals in 1984 and '88.

6. BONNIE BLAIR, USA, SPEED SKATING
A tiny dynamo in a sport filled with long-legged powerhouses, Blair won the 500 meters in three straight Olympics (1988, '92, '94) and the 1,000 meters gold in '92 and '94. Her six medals overall are the most won by any U.S. athlete in Winter Olympics history.

7. PEGGY FLEMING, USA, FIGURE SKATING
Gliding across the ice with what seemed to be effortless grace, Fleming skated a flawless program to win the only gold medal by an American at the 1968 Grenoble Games.

8. DOROTHY HAMILL, USA, FIGURE SKATING
Hamill, with her signature Hamill Camel spin, charmed a world audience in winning the '76 gold medal.

9. ANDREA MEAD LAWRENCE, USA, ALPINE SKIING
Lawrence missed a gate during one of her slalom runs at the 1952 Oslo Games but got back on course and skied to victory. By also winning the giant slalom, she became the first American skier to win multiple gold medals in one Olympics.

10. EUGENIO MONTI, ITALY, BOBSLED
Monti won six medals over three Olympics (1956, '64, '68). In 1964, he and his partner were leading the two-man competition. When the British team discovered a vital part of their sled had broken, Monti, showing true Olympic spirit, gave them the same part from his sled to use. The British team went on to win in record time, and Monti had to settle for third. Four years later, the 40-year-old Monti was rewarded when he drove his team to victory in both the two- and four-man competitions. ■

Clockwise from top right: Winter Games greats Eric Heiden, Katarina Witt, Bjørn Dählie and Sonja Henie.

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: TONY DUFFY/ALLSPORT; CORBIS-REUTERS; VANDYSTADT/ALLSPORT; CORBIS/BETTMANN-UPI

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Welcome to Miami,

MIAMI, ALL IS FORGIVEN. EVERY LAST transgression. Your tacky, pink flamingos? Forgiven. Your gaudy, pastel architecture? Forgiven. Gloria Estefan? Forgiven. Those hairy men skating around in their Speedos? Forgiven. How can I hold a grudge, after all, when you are the unofficial capital of beautiful people, particularly those beautiful people who push the limits of decent exposure. It's a joy to behold these creatures, tan and bursting with life, and even a greater joy to watch them explore your greatest sporting attractions: your beaches, your waters and, of course, your clubs. Speaking of which, that vicious hangover you gave me this morning? Entirely forgiven.

OPPOSITE:
MEET CAROLINA DE MORAS
Hometown: Santiago, Chile
Favorite Sport: Volleyball
Favorite Athlete: Marcelo Rios
Interesting Fact No. 1:
Favorite movie is *Gone With the Wind*
Interesting Fact No. 2:
Worst thing about modeling is having to be "spectacular at 6 a.m. every day"

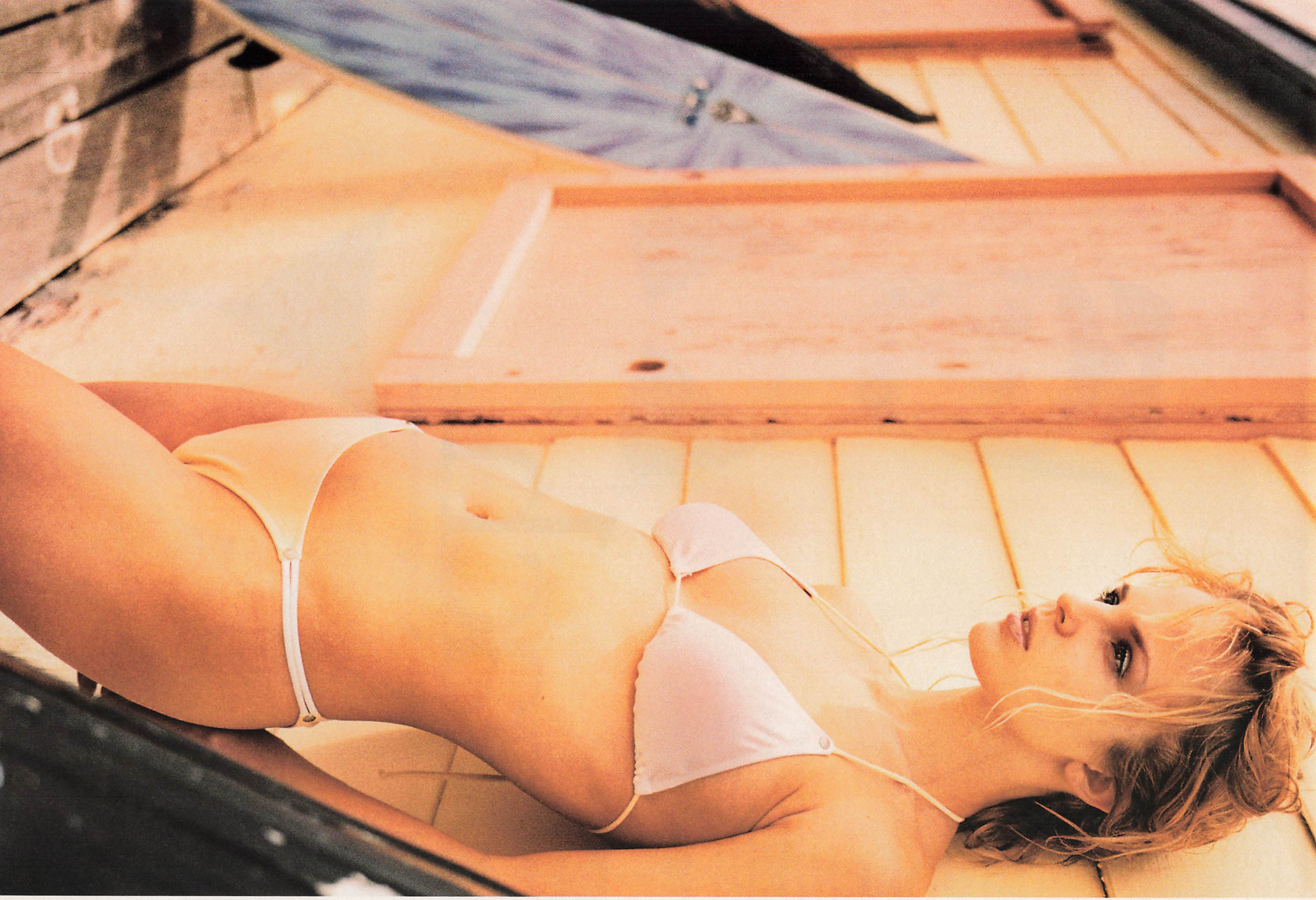
Swimsuit by Benetton, $58

Beach

the Unofficial Capital of Beautiful People > Photography by Richard Dean

THIS PAGE:
MEET ROBIN QUEEN
Hometown: Seattle, Wash.
Favorite Sport: Snowboarding
Favorite Athlete:
Edwin Moses
Interesting Fact No. 1:
Favorite shoot location is Australia
Interesting Fact. No. 2:
Wants to act in a movie opposite Ben Stiller

Mask and Snorkel from NI3D, $17.95 and $5.25
String silvery blue with turquoise trim bikini by 55 DSL, $65



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OPPOSITE:
Raw board (blue) from ZJ Boarding House, $355
Yellow bikini by Versace, $264

THIS PAGE:
Orange silk bikini briefs by Versace, $175

Portable volleyball net and ball from Centerline Sports, $269 and $15
Raw board (yellow), $365, BZ Bodyboard, $59.95, Raw board (blue), $355; all three from ZJ Boarding House

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Mixed Reviews

Edited by Scott Burton

WEB SITES

Site: www.fantasyleaguesports.com

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

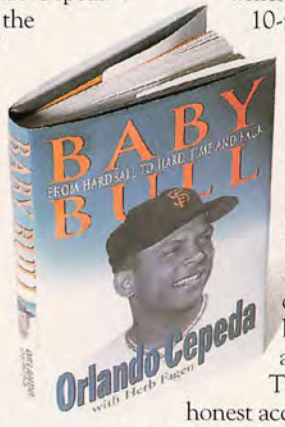
Do you know who Jason Maxwell is? Do you, roto punk? We didn't think so, but let Max Duffy, a.k.a. MD 20/20, fill you in. Mr. Duffy, if you will: "The Tigers picked up Maxwell as a utility infielder replacement for the injured Jason Wood. The only reason you would even think about drafting Maxwell in a fantasy league is if you're in an AL-only league with at least 12 owners." Impressive, huh? Mr. Duffy is the brains behind a new fantasy sports site that ranks players, dispenses custom advice to readers, and analyzes the impact the latest transactions have on fantasy player values. So far, Duffy and his gang only have their baseball pages up, but they're adding other sports soon. The advice-dispensing portion of the site costs you some clams, but the rest of the site is free. Duffy knows his stuff, if you didn't gather from his assessment of the obscure Maxwell, so give it a look the next time you're baffled by a fantasy-league quandary, or are just too plain lazy to do your own research.

BOOKS

Book: Baby Bull
Author: Orlando Cepeda with Herb Fagen
Publisher: Taylor Publishing Co.
Price: $22.95

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Talk about perfect timing. Just when Orlando Cepeda is inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, the controversial slugger releases an autobiography, appropriately titled *Baby Bull: From Hardball to Hard Time and Back*. Some say the Puerto Rican legend was a bigger fan favorite in San Francisco than teammate Willie Mays, with his popularity and eye-catching stats, yet it took years for him to garner enough votes for Cooperstown. Instead of honoring the man who was named Rookie of the Year in '58 and NL MVP almost a decade later, voters often remembered his tumultuous life after baseball, which included a 10-month stint in prison for marijuana possession. Readers will appreciate Cepeda's candor in describing his triumphs and ordeals. The brutally honest accounts of his rise to fame, his fall from grace and his spiritual resurrection make this book a worthwhile read.

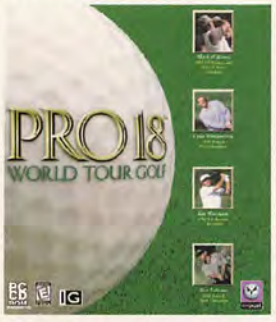


—*Andy Bhatt*

VIDEO GAMES

Game: Pro 18: World Tour Golf
Maker: Psygnosis
Platform: PlayStation, PC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11



Pro 18 is marked by beautiful course offerings, such as Coeur d'Alene in Idaho, and the Lost City golf course in Sun City, South Africa. Nice time effects will splash shadows on the courses in late day. Play as a pro or create your own golfer.

—*Paul M. Johnson*

Game: Tiger Woods '99 PGA Tour Golf
Maker: EA Sports
Platform: PlayStation, PC

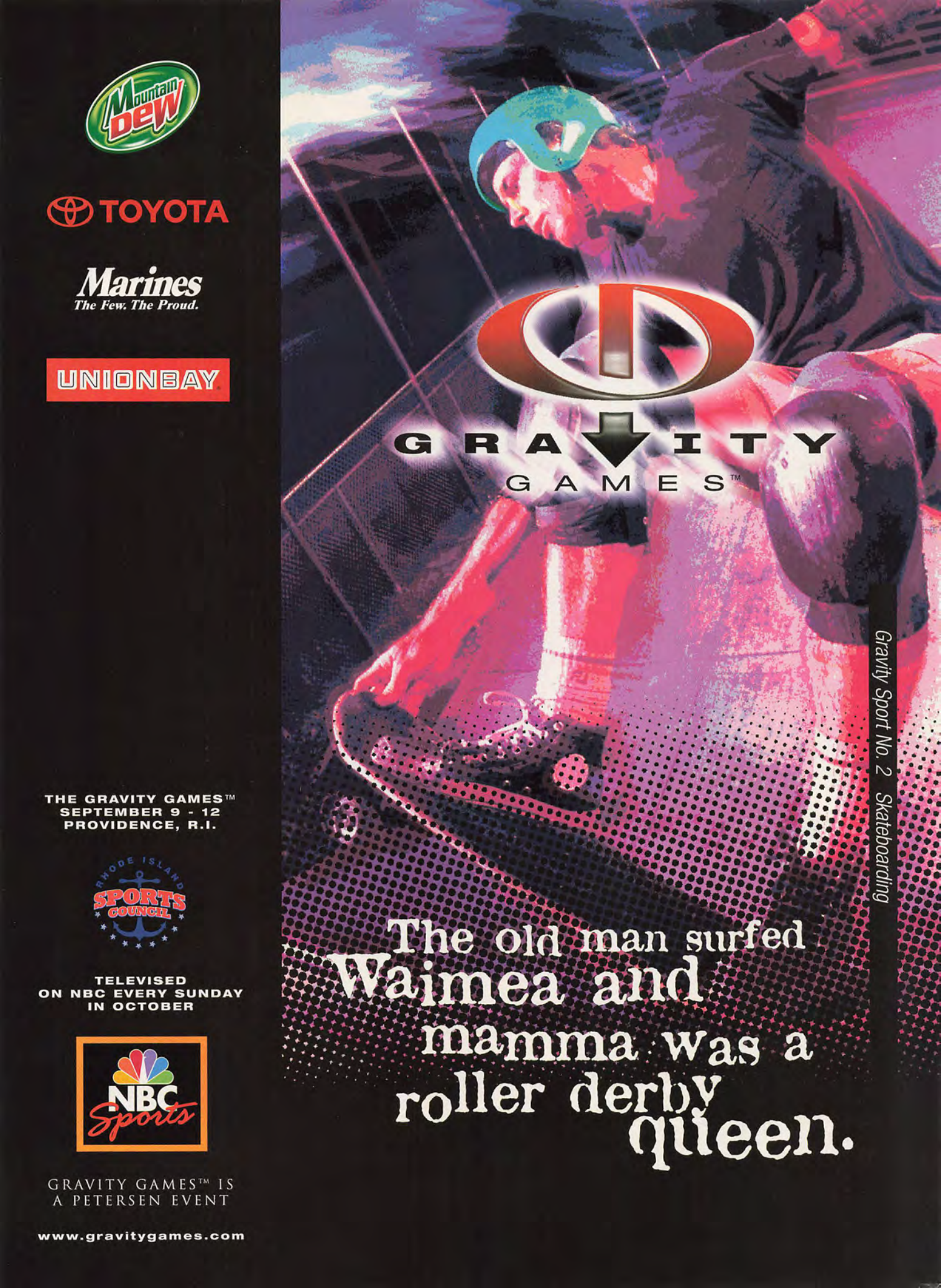
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Somehow it'd figure that the golf title that owned Tiger Woods' stamp would separate itself from the rest. It's hard to recall another game in which a golfer sinks a putt and then proceeds to "raise the roof." Also rare in golf games but found here is background music and, yes, trash-talking. It's in the two-player version of the game and was put in at the request of Woods (as was the music).

—*PJ*

BOOK: EVAN AGOSTINI

Sport Power Rating Bar ("Ours goes to 11") 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11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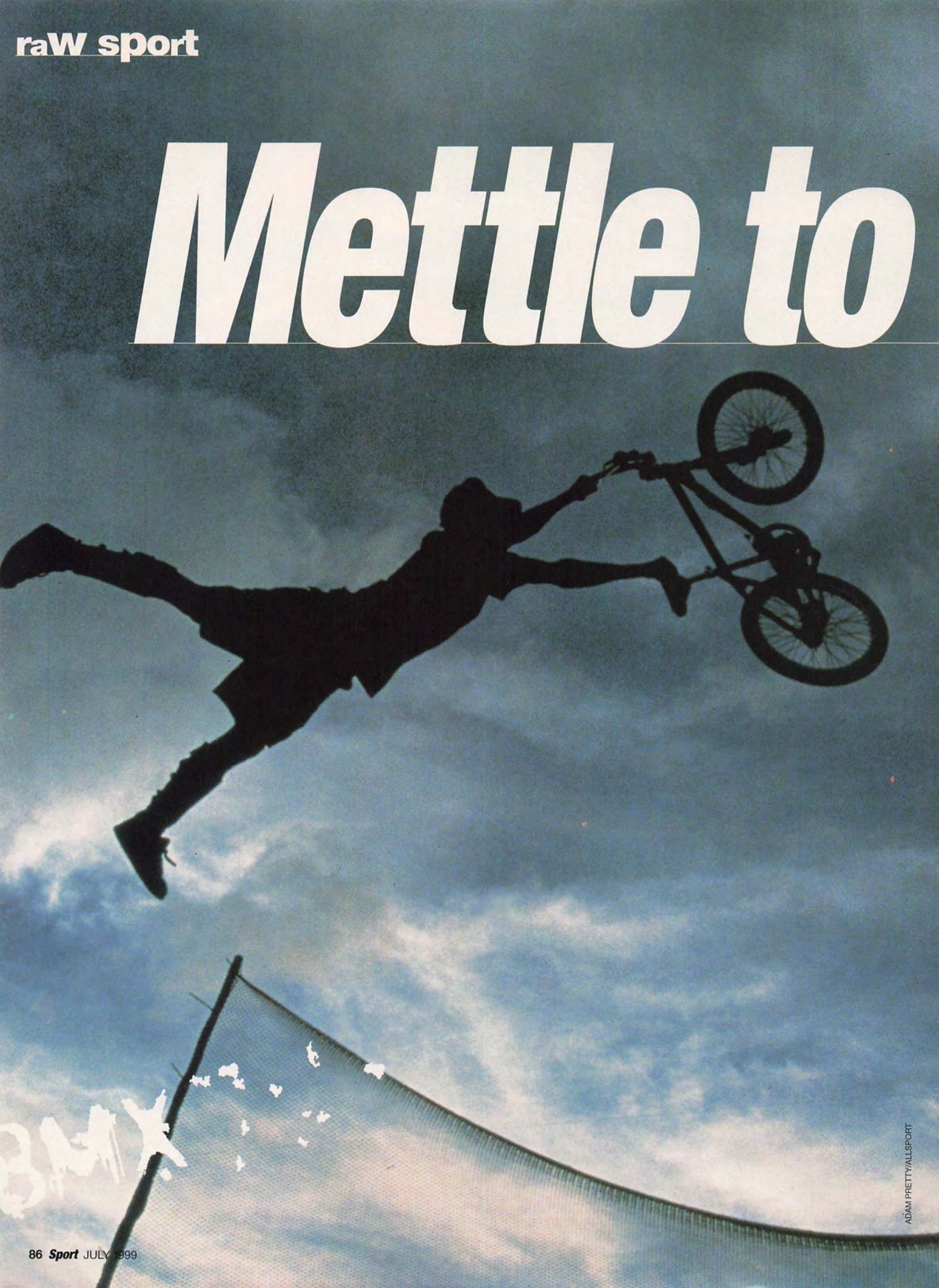

ADAM PRETTY/ALLSPORT

the Pedal

It's Just the Basics for BMX Riders Who Push Themselves in Grueling Sprint Races > By Dan Gordon

WANNA KNOW WHAT MAKES BMX racing such an appealing spectacle? The accessibility. After all, we all know how to ride a bike, and who among us has never raced with friends, popped a wheelie or caught some air going over a street bump? OK, so BMXers catch more air than we ever did. And when we caught air, we never seized the opportunity to do a double back-flip—a trick first performed by Jay "The Canadian Beast" Miron, a five-time world champion. But all it takes to compete is a bicycle, a helmet, some pads and a whole lot of moxie.

BMX dates as far back as the early 1960s, when a group of young California kids decided to simulate the motocross experience on bicycles with 20-inch wheels. A quarter-century later, BMX tracks are everywhere. Youngsters start racing as young as age 5, and a handful of spin-off BMX categories have emerged in addition to BMX racing, including two kinds of jumping (vert and dirt), and street and flatland competitions.

The key differences between BMX racing and motocross relate to the terrain: BMX tracks are smoother. "We don't have the suspension to just blow through potholes," says Brian Foster, who has won world championships in both BMX racing and jumping. While Foster gives motocross racers the nod when it comes to the "go-for-it" mentality, BMXers, driven only by their own two legs, must be in excellent shape for their sprints, which last some 45 grueling seconds. Says Foster: "You have to worry about bumping into the guy in front of you, hitting the jump and getting ready for the next turn, all at the same time."

BMX jumpers, on the other hand, don't have to worry about the next guy, and the best ones innovate rather than follow. For dirt jumper Joey Garcia, jumping is about freedom: You get to try whatever you want, go at your own pace and hang out with friends. Foster says it's only recently that dirt jumpers have been thrust into the competitive spotlight. "It was always a bunch of kids in a field with shovels and a stereo," he says.

At age 8, Foster began racing his older brother on a track they had built in their backyard. Today, at 26, he has his own line of signature sneakers and Schwinn bicycles. "When I graduated high school, it was either go to college or race bikes," Foster says. "I stayed with the bikes and it's worked out."

BMX pros give up a lot to compete, starting with their bodies. Garcia had reconstructive ACL surgery on both knees before he reached the legal drinking age. As for the Canadian Beast, "I'm a freakin' wreck," says Miron, matter-of-factly. At 28, he must ice his shoulders down every day and get massaged twice a week in order to feel well enough to perform. His knees no longer allow him to jog five or six miles a day as he once did. "I'm doing harder tricks because my level of riding has progressed, but I'm just not capable of training as hard as I used to," he says. Not that any of these top pros would trade the experience.

Says Foster: "It's a job, sure, and sometimes I complain about things, but I mean, I'm riding my bike."

The Superman (*left*) is one of the most difficult and electrifying moves in BMX jumping.

GRAVITY GAMES

Ready for the ultimate showcase in cutting-edge adrenaline sports? The first annual Summer Gravity Games lifts off in Providence, R.I., on Sept. 9-12. For more info, log on to: www.gravitygames.com. Next month's preview: in-line skating.

The various BMX genres include (*clockwise from top left*) flatland, street and vert jumping.

RAW DATA

Bicycle motocross (BMX) is divided into five categories. Because racing and jumping require such different skills, few riders compete—and even fewer excel—at both. Both the National Bicycle League and the American Bicycle Association hold their own BMX racing series, with cumulative point totals leading to champions at the end of each year.

BMX RACING: Riders (typically eight at a time) compete on a winding dirt course, less than a quarter-mile long, with a variety of jumps and bank turns. Several motos (heats) take place, and the first one to the finish line wins the heat.

DIRT JUMPING: Riders launch from one ramp, perform midair tricks, then land on a second ramp. The most awe-inspiring tricks are the flips and spins, though the pros know that what looks the flashiest isn't necessarily the most technically difficult.

VERT JUMPING: Riders perform a variety of freestyle aerial tricks on the U-shaped half-pipe and receive scores from a panel of judges.

STREET: Riders perform choreographed jumps and grinds in the open, using a wide variety of ramps and other obstacles, such as curbs, trash cans and hand rails.

FLATLAND: Riders perform balancing tricks on pavement, without the benefit of ramps. For instance, they step over their bike frames while in motion, using foot pegs attached to the front and real axles.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: TONY DONALDSON; TOM HAUCK/ALLSPORT; COURTESY ALAN TAYLOR; TONY DONA

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BMX

John Parker catches some serious air at a vert competition.

TONY DONALDSON

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IN FACT

Between them, ABC, NBC, Fox, ESPN and MTV scheduled 627 hours of BMX racing and jumping in 1999.

BMX

RAW DICTIONARY

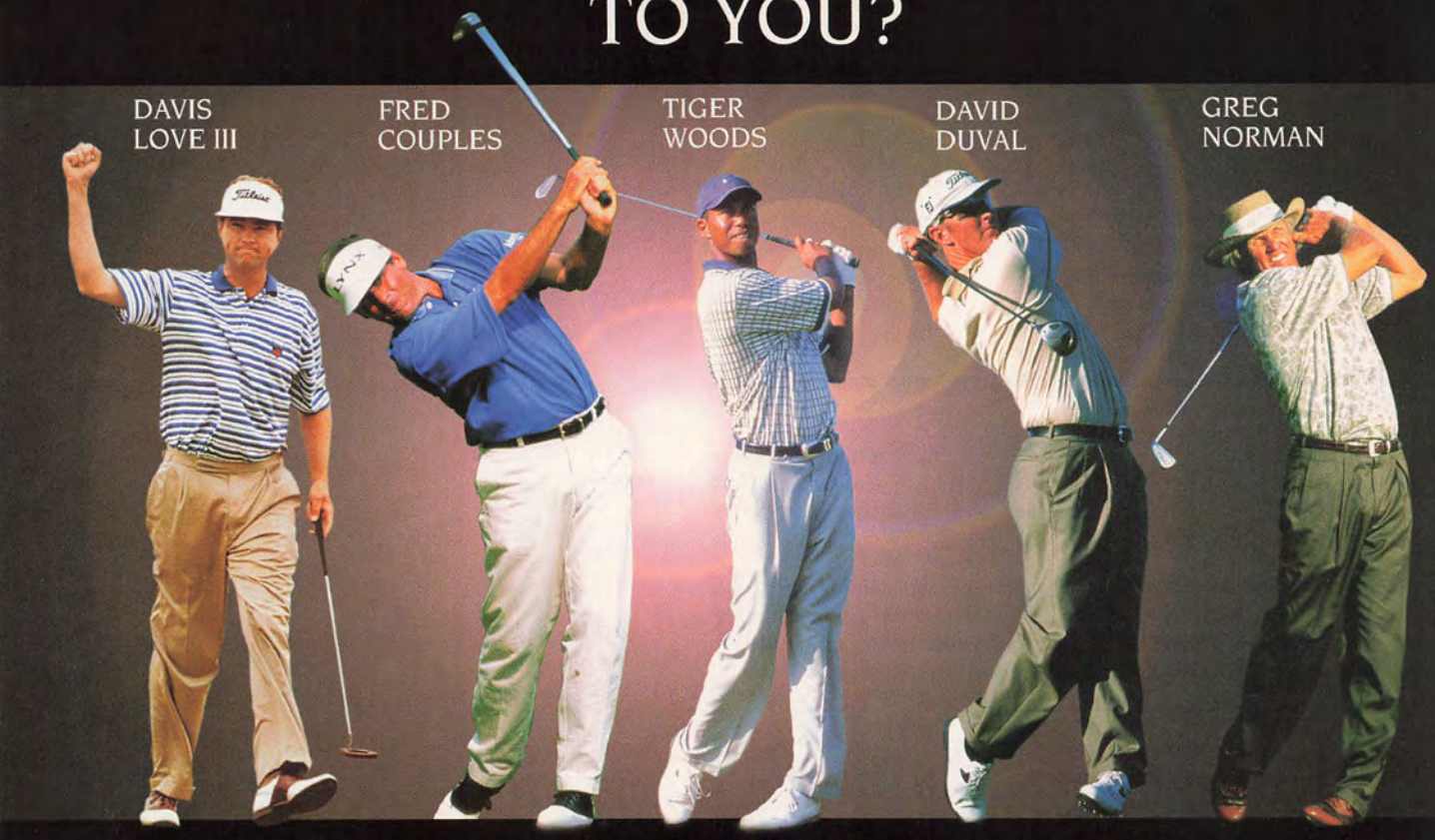
BUS DRIVER: Spinning the handlebars around in the air with one hand, while the other hand stays on the bars.
CANDY BAR: Taking one foot off the pedal and stretching it over the handlebars.
DEAD SAILOR: In dirt jumping or street, when the rider starts to attempt a trick, something goes wrong and he ends up doing nothing.
DOG PISS AIR: The vert term for a dead sailor.
NAC NAC: Kicking a leg over and across the top tube of the bike and then bringing it back—a move also familiar to motocross.
NOTHINGS: Taking one's hands and feet off the handlebars and pedals.
PACK: Two dirt mounds in a row, one for takeoff and one for landing. A term commonly used to describe multiple packs—a six-pack, or, on a more extreme trail, an 18-pack.
RHYTHM SECTION: More than two packs in a row.
SUPERMAN: Getting off the seat while airborne, holding the handlebars and stretching your legs behind the bike.
TRUCK DRIVER: A bus driver performed during a 360-degree midair spin.

OVERTIME

Rad **is considered the seminal BMX movie, having jump-started the sport among Gen-Xers in the early 1980s.**

ALL BY TONY DONALDSON

DO THE WORDS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?



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SPORT QUIZ

By Dan Gordon

1. Name the last NBA team to win a championship with no player averaging 20 points or more (minimum 40 games played), and name the scoring leader for that team.

2. Which NBA team posted the best single-season playoff winning percentage?

A. Bucks, 1971
B. 76ers, 1983
C. Pistons, 1989
D. Bulls, 1996

3. Who is the only NBA player to win both the MVP and Sixth Man awards during his career?

4. Who is the shortest player to win NBA Rookie of the Year?

5. Who was the WNBA's MVP in the league's inaugural season?

6. The Yankees' 24 World Series titles are by far the most among major-league franchises. Name one of the two franchises tied for second with nine championships.

7. Match the superstar pitcher with the state in which he was born.

A. Kevin Brown	1. California
B. Roger Clemens	2. Georgia
C. Randy Johnson	3. Ohio
D. Greg Maddux	4. Texas

8. Four 1998 Gold Glove winners are sons of former major-leaguers. Name them.

9. Before Nomar Garciaparra did it in 1997 and '98, only four major-leaguers had hit 30 homers in each of their first two seasons: Rudy York in 1937 and '38 and three players who accomplished the feat in the 1980s. Name two of the three.

10. Prior to the Evander Holyfield-Lennox Lewis bout in March, only three heavyweight championship fights had resulted in draws: Tommy Burns vs. Jack O'Brien in 1906, Jack Johnson vs. Jim Johnson in 1913, and a bout in 1983 that featured which two heavyweights?

The *Sport* Stumper

This Month's Stumper: Entering this season, only two NBA lottery picks had won championships with the teams that drafted them. Name them.

Answer to last month's stumper (Name the only NBA champion since 1956 that did not include a member of the 50 Greatest Players list that the league released in 1996): Seattle, 1978-79

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[This Month's Pin: Baseball]
Fax your answer to *Sport* Quiz, 212.886.2802, or mail it to 110 Fifth Ave., 4th floor, New York, N.Y. 10011. Limit one per person. All entries must be postmarked by June 15, 1999.

THIS MONTH'S QUIZ ANSWERS

Answers: 1. Detroit in 1989-90, led by Isiah Thomas, who averaged 18.4 2. B. 92.3 (12-1) 3. Bill Walton, MVP with Portland in 1978 and Sixth Man with Boston in 1986 4. 1996 winner Damon Stoudamire, who is 5-foot-10 5. Cynthia Cooper, Houston Comets 6. St. Louis Cardinals and Philadelphia/Oakland Athletics 7. A-2, B-3, C-1, D-4 8. Ken Griffey Jr., Roberto Alomar, Bret Boone and Barry Bonds 9. Ron Kittle, Chicago White Sox, 1983 and '84; Jose Canseco, Oakland, 1986 and '87; Mark McGwire, Oakland, 1987 and '88 10. Michael Dokes and Mike Weaver

Nomar Garciaparra

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A	C	T	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	E	E	E
S	E	R	V	E	D	■	■	■	C	E	P	E	D	A
■	■	■	O	D	O	M	■	■	B	R	A	■	■	■
W	O	R	L	D	C	U	P	■	C	E	S	T	A	■
H	I	E	S	■	■	D	A	N	■	■	T	A	N	K
I	L	L	■	A	N	D	R	E	A	G	A	S	S	I
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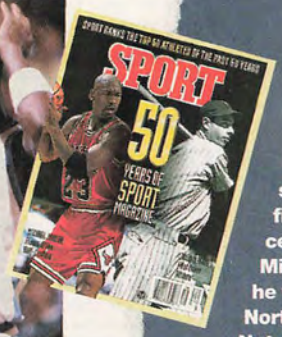

You're good, Michael Jordan, but don't let it go to your head.

MICHAEL JORDAN IS OVERRATED

Call us crazy (Tar Heel fans will call us a lot worse), but from where we sit, Michael Jordan is clearly *not* the best player in the college game today. Nor are we alone in our opinion. We asked a dozen coaches to pick one player to start a team with and, after asking not to be identified ("We might have to play North Carolina later in the year"), every one of them proceeded to pick Akeem, Patrick Ewing or Wayman Tisdale. Many of them even expressed the sentiment that Jordan may not be the best player *on his team*. "Sam Perkins is playing with a ferocity this year that only the closeness of NBA dollars brings out in some players," said one ACC mentor.

Is Jordan even the best guard in the country? Well, five of the coaches preferred St. John's Chris Mullin, and why not? While Jordan is a streak shooter, Mullin hits at 60 percent, with far better range. While Jordan tends to get out of control and can be counted on for two to three travels a game, Mullin has been busy piling up the assists (Top 10 in the Big East) and is, statistically at least, the better rebounder. Certainly the Tar Heel guard is a clutch performer and the superior talent, but Mullin does more with what he's got, a la Larry Bird. For further comparison shopping, both will be showcased on this year's Olympic team.

We're a pretty bright bunch here at SPORT, but occasionally we do misfire. Take our predecessors' diagnosis of Michael Jordan when he was a wee lad at North Carolina in 1984. Not only did we call him overrated (*see left*), we even said he wasn't the best player on his team. Oops. We made amends in our special 50th Anniversary issue of SPORT in September '96, in which we chose the top 50 athletes of the past half-century. MJ, getting the nod over runners-up Muhammad Ali and Jackie Robinson, took the cake.

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